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WOLF EAR:
THE INDIAN

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The young Ogalalla formed a deep attachment for little Edith.—Page 17

Wolf Ear the Indian

By Edward S. Ellis

Illustrated

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Wolf Ear the Indian

CHAPTER ONE

"THE BULLET HAD PASSED STARTLINGLY NEAR HIM"

BEFORE relating to my young friends the incidents which follow, I think a few words of explanation will help them.

Perhaps some of you share the general mistake that the American Indians are dying out. This is not the fact. There are to-day more red men in the United States than ever before. In number, they exceed a quarter of a million, and, though they do not increase as fast as the whites, still they are increasing.

It is true that a great many tribes have disappeared, while others that were once numerous and powerful have dwindled to a few hundreds; but on the other hand, tribes that were hardly known a century ago, now include thousands.

The many wars we have had with the Indians have been caused, almost without exception, by gross injustice towards the red men. They have been wronged in every way until in their rage they turned against their oppressors. The sad fact at such times is that the ones who have used them so ill generally escape harm, while the innocent suffer. The Indian reasons that it is the white race that has wronged him, so he does them all the injury he can, without caring whether the one whom he slays has had a hand in his own persecution.

The Indian, like all savages, is very superstitious. He loves to think over the time, hundreds of years ago, when the red men roamed over the whole continent from ocean to ocean. He dreams of those days, and believes they will again return—that the pale faces will be driven into the sea, and the vast land become the hunting ground of the Indians.

Some years ago this strange faith took a wonderfully strong hold upon those people. The belief spread that a Messiah was coming in the spring of 1891, who would destroy the pale faces and give all the country back to the red men. They began holding wild dances, at which the dancers took hold of hands and leaped and shouted and circled round and round until they dropped to the ground, senseless and almost dead. Those "ghost dances," as they were called, were carried on to please the new Messiah. When the dancers recovered, they told strange stories of having visited the other world. All who listened believed them.

The craze spread like wildfire, and before the Government understood what was going on, the Indians were making ready for war. They were well armed, and eager to attack the whites. The principal tribe was the Dakota or Sioux, the most powerful on the American Continent.

The leading chief, or medicine man, was Sitting Bull. He was a bad man who had made trouble for more than twenty years. He could not endure the white men, and, when not actively engaged against them, was thinking out some scheme of evil.

As soon as the new Messiah craze broke out, he turned it to account. He sent his friends among the tribes and urged them to unite in a general war against the whites. The officers and soldiers were very kind

and patient, and did their best to soothe the red men, but matters grew worse and worse. Trouble was sure to come if Sitting Bull were permitted to keep up his mischievous work.

So it was decided to arrest him. In the attempt several people were killed, among them Sitting Bull himself. Danger still threatened, and many believed that it would require a great battle to subdue the Indians.

Now, if you will look at the map of the United States, you will notice that the Missouri River runs across the middle of the State of South Dakota. On the southern boundary of the State, a large tract of land reaching one-third of the way westward to Wyoming, and with the White River forming in a general way the northern boundary, makes what is known as the Indian reservation.

There are many of these in the West. They belong to the Indians, and the Government has an agency at each, to see that no white people intrude. The Indians are forbidden to leave these reservations without obtaining permission, and at the agency they receive the annuities or supplies paid to them by the United States Government for the lands elsewhere which they have given up.

Half of the reservation directly west of the Missouri is the Rosebud Agency, and the other half the Pine Ridge Agency. It was at the latter that the grave trouble threatened.

When the discontent was so general, the danger extended hundreds of miles north and west. That section is thinly settled, and the pioneers were in great peril. Most of them hurried to the nearest forts for safety, while others waited, hoping that the cloud would soon pass by.

Your map of South Dakota will show you a small stream to the

westward of Pine Ridge, named Raccoon Creek, a tributary of Cherry Creek, itself a branch of the Big Cheyenne.

At the time of the troubles, the Kingsland family, consisting of Hugh, a man in middle life, his wife, Molly, his daughter Edith, eight years old, and his son Brinton, a little more than double her age, were living on Raccoon Creek.

The family had emigrated thither three years before from Kansas, and all would have gone well in their new home, but for the illness of Mr. Kingsland.

Something in the climate disagreed with him, though the rest of the family throve. He was first brought low with chills and fever, which after several months' obstinate fight finally left him weak and dispirited. Then, when he was fairly recovered, the slipping of an axe in his hands so wounded his foot that he was laid up for two months more.

It looked as if ill-fortune was to follow him so long at least as he stayed in South Dakota, for sickness, accident and misfortune succeeded one another, until he would have despaired but for those about him.

His wife was well fitted to be the helpmate of a pioneer, for she was hopeful, industrious, strong, and brave. She carefully nursed him, making light of their affiictions, and declaring that all would soon come right, and that prosperity would prove the sweeter from having been deferred so long.

Edith, bright-eyed, pretty, affectionate and loving, was the comfort of those hours which otherwise would have been intolerably dismal, when confined in his small humble home. He read to her and taught her, told her delightful fairy stories, listened to her innocent prattle, and exchanged the sweetest of confidences.

Sometimes Hugh Kingsland wondered after all whether he was not the most fortunate individual in the world in being thus blessed in his family relations.

And there was another from whom the meed of praise must not be withheld. That was Brinton, now close upon seventeen years of age. The ill-fortune to which we have alluded made him in one sense the virtual head of the family. He was strong, cheerful, and resembled his mother in his hopeful disposition. The difficulties in which his father was continually involved brought out the real manhood of his nature. He looked after the cattle and live stock, galloped across the plains to Hermosa, Fairburn, Rapid City, and other points for supplies or on other business, or, fording the Big Cheyenne, White, and smaller streams, crossed the reservation to Pine Ridge.

Well fitted to be the helpmate of a pioneer.

The youth was indispensable, and did his work so well, that the father occasionally remarked that he sometimes thought of continuing to play the sick man, since it proved that he was of no account.

"I hope you will soon become well," said the red-cheeked lad one evening, as the group gathered around the fire; "but stay here in the house as long as you wish, for mother, Edith and I can get along without your help."

"Yes, husband; don't fret over that. Only become well, and until you do so, be assured that everything is going along as it should."

"I have never had a doubt of that; but, ah me," he sighed, "this is tiresome after all, especially when it begins to look as though I should never be well again."

"For my part," said Edith earnestly, "I don't want you to get well, and I am praying that you will not."

"Why, Edith!" exclaimed the mother reproachfully, while her brother did not know whether to laugh or be shocked at the odd expression. As for the father, he laughed more heartily than he had done for weeks.

Edith looked wonderingly in their faces, and felt that some explanation was necessary.

"I mean to say—that I don't mean anything bad; but if papa gets well enough to ride out to look after the cattle, and is working all day, why, I won't have anyone to tell me stories and read to me and do funny things."

"Your explanation is satisfactory," said her father, smiling. "I shall have to stay in the house for some weeks—that is certain, and perhaps longer."

"Oh, I am so glad!"

But with the first clapping of the chubby hands, Edith realized that she was doing wrong again, and she added in a gentler voice:

He turned his head, and saw the figure of a Sioux buck on his horse.—Page 14

"If papa feels bad when he is ill, then I am sorry for him, and will pray every night and morning that he may get well."

It was winter time, and the Kingslands in their humble home could not be ignorant of the alarming state of affairs around them. They had been urged to come into the agency while it was safe to do so, for the revolt among the Indians was spreading, and there was no saying when escape would be cut off. The family had considered the question with the seriousness due so important a matter.

Naturally, they were reluctant to abandon their home now, for it would be virtually throwing away everything they owned in the world; but when it became a question of life and death, there could be no hesitation.

On the very night, however, that the decision to remove to the agency was made, Sergeant Victor Parkhurst, who was out on a scout, with a squad of men from Pine Ridge, called at their home and stated his belief that no trouble would occur. He said it would be better if the family were at Pine Ridge, and he offered to escort them thither. But, in Mr. Kingsland's feeble condition, he said it would be as well for him to stay where he was, since he must run great risk by exposure in the depth of winter.

The next caller at the cabin was Nicholas Jackson, who had been a scout under General Crook, and was now serving General Miles in the same capacity at Pine Ridge. He brought news of Sitting Bull's death and assured the pioneer that every day spent by him and his family away from the agency increased their peril.

"You shouldn't delay your start a single hour," was his remark, as he vaulted upon his pony and skurried away.

Before deciding the all important question, it was agreed that Brin-

ton should gallop down to the reservation and learn the real situation. It was a long ride to Pine Ridge, and involved the crossing of the Cheyenne, White, and several smaller streams, but the youth was confident he could penetrate far enough to ascertain the truth and get back by sunset. If it were necessary to go all the way to the agency, this was impossible, for the days were at their shortest; but he must penetrate that far to find out what he wished to know.

When Brinton flung himself into the saddle of Jack, his tough and intelligent pony, just as it was beginning to grow light in the east, after his hasty breakfast and good-bye, he was sure he would be caught in a snow storm before his return. The dull, heavy sky, and the peculiar penetrating chilliness, left no doubt on that point.

But with his usual pluck, he chirruped to his pony, lightly jerked his bridle rein, and the gallant animal was off at a swinging pace, which he was able to maintain for hours without fatigue. He was heading south-east, over the faintly marked trail, with which the youth was familiar and which was so well known to the animal himself that he needed no guidance.

Two hours later, the young horseman reached the border line of Custer and Washington counties, that is between the county of his own home and the reservation. This was made by the Big Cheyenne River, which had to be crossed before Pine Ridge was reached. Brinton reined up his horse and sat for some minutes, looking down on the stream in which huge pieces of ice were floating, though it was not frozen over.

"That isn't very inviting, Jack," he said, "but the ford is shallow, and it's no use waiting."

He was in the act of starting his pony down the bank, when on the

heavy, chilly air sounded a dull, explosive crack. A nipping of his coat sleeve showed that a bullet had passed startlingly near him. He turned his head like a flash, and saw, not more than a hundred feet distant, the figure of a Sioux buck or young warrior bareback on his horse, which was standing motionless, while his rider made ready to let fly with another shot from his Winchester rifle.

CHAPTER TWO

"HE'S UP TO SOME MISCHIEF, I'LL WARRANT."

THE instant Brinton Kingsland looked around and saw the Indian on his pony, a short distance away, with his rifle at his shoulder and about to fire a second time, he brought his own Winchester to a level and aimed at the one who had attempted thus treacherously to shoot him in the back.

The Indian was no older than himself, sitting firmly on the bare back of his horse, with his blanket wrapped about his shoulders, and several stained eagle feathers protruding from his hair, as black and coarse as that of his pony's tail. His dark eyes glittered as they glanced along the barrel of his rifle, and he aimed straight at the breast of the youth, who, instead of flinging himself over the side of his horse in the attempt to dodge the deadly missile, sat bolt upright and aimed in turn at the miscreant, who, as if stirred by the same scorn of personal danger, remained firmly in his seat.

It all depended on who should fire first, and that which we have related took place, as may be said, in the twinkling of an eye.

But with the weapons poised, the eyes of the two glancing along the barrels and the fingers on the triggers, neither gun was discharged. Brinton was on the point of firing, when the Indian abruptly lowered his Winchester, with the exclamation:

"Hoof! Brinton!"

The white youth had recognized the other at the same instant when

another moment would have been too late. He, too, dropped the stock of his gun from his shoulder and called out with a surprised expression,

"Wolf Ear!"

The Indian touched his pony with his heel, and the animal moved forward briskly, until the riders faced each other within arm's length.

"How do you do?" asked the Ogalalla, extending his hand, which Brinton took with a smile, and the reproving remark:

"I did not expect such a welcome from you, Wolf Ear."

"I did not know it was you, good friend Brinton."

"And suppose you did not; are you the sort of a warrior that shoots another in the back?"

The broad face, with its high cheek bones, coppery skin, low forehead and Roman nose, changed from the pleasant smile which gave a glimpse of the even white teeth, to a scowl, that told the ugly feelings that had been stirred by the questioning remark of the white youth.

"Your people have become my enemies: they have killed Sitting Bull, Black Bird, Catch-the-Bear, Little Assiniboine, Spotted Horse Bull, Brave Thunder, and my friend Crow Foot, who was the favorite son of Sitting Bull. He was as a brother to me."

"And you people have killed Bull Head, Shave Head, Little Eagle, Afraid-of-Soldiers, Hawk Man, and others of their own race, who were wise enough to remain friends of our people. I know of that fight when they set out to arrest Sitting Bull."

"They had no right to arrest him," said Wolf Ear, with a flash of his black eyes; "he was in his own teepee (or tent), and harming no one when they took him."

"He was doing more harm to his own people as well as ours, than all the other malcontents together. He was the plotter of mischief; he

encouraged this nonsense about the ghost dances and the coming Messiah, and was doing all he could to bring on a great war between my people and yours. His death is the best fortune that could come to the Indians."

"It was murder," said Wolf Ear, sullenly, and then, before the other could frame a reply, his face suddenly lighted up.

"But you and I, Brinton, are friends; I shot at you because I thought you were some one else; it would have grieved my heart had I done you harm; I am glad I did not; I offer you my hand."

Young Kingsland could not refuse the proffer, though he was far from feeling comfortable, despite his narrow escape a moment before.

"I thought you were a civilized Indian, Wolf Ear," he added, as he relinquished the grasp, and the two once more looked in each other's faces; "you told me so when I last saw you."

Wolf Ear, the Ogalalla, was sent to Carlisle, when only eight years old. Unusually bright, he had made good progress, and won the golden opinions of his teachers by his gentle, studious deportment, and affection for those that had been kind to him.

He spoke English as well as the whites, and was a fine scholar. He went back to his people, when sixteen years old, and did what he could to win them from their savagery and barbarism.

He and Brinton Kingsland met while hunting at the base of the Black Hills, and became great friends. The young Ogalalla visited the white youth at his home on Raccoon Creek, where he was kindly treated by the Kingslands, and formed a deep attachment for little Edith.

But nothing had been seen of Wolf Ear for several months. The home of his people was some distance away, but that should not have

prevented him from visiting his white friends, who often wondered why he did not show himself among them.

Rather curiously, Brinton was thinking of his dusky comrade at the moment he was roused by the shot which nipped his coat sleeve. It was natural that he should be disappointed, and impatient to find that this bright Indian youth, who had lived for several years among civilized people, was carried away by the wave of excitement that was sweeping across the country. He knew that his twin brother and his father were still savages, and it was easy to find excuse for them, but not for Wolf Ear."

"You believe in the coming of One to save your people—why should not we place faith in the coming of *our Messiah?*" was the pertinent question of Wolf Ear.

"What is this revelation?" asked Brinton, who had heard many conflicting accounts of the strange craze, and felt a natural desire for an authoritative statement.

"The Messiah once descended to save the white race, but they rejected him and put him to death. In turn he rejects them, and will come in the spring, when the grass is about two inches high, and save his red children and destroy his white ones. He has enjoined upon all of us who believe in him to wear a certain dress and to practise the ghost dance, as often and as long as we possibly can, as a proof of our faith. If any of us die from exhaustion, while performing this ceremony, we will be taken direct to the Messiah, where we shall meet those who have died, and whence we will come back to tell the living what we have seen and heard. When the Messiah comes in the spring, a new earth will be created, covering the present world, burying all the whites and those red men that have not joined in the dance. The Mes-

siah will again bring with him the departed of our own people, and the earth shall once more be as our forefathers knew it, except there shall be no more death."

Brinton Kingsland listened, amazed, as this expression fell from the lips of one who had often lamented the superstitions of his own race. That he believed the words he uttered was proven by his earnestness of manner and the glow of his countenance. The white youth carefully restrained his impulse to ridicule the strange faith, for that assuredly would have given offense to the fanatic, who had the right to believe whatever he chose.

"Well, Wolf Ear, I can only say I am sorry that you should have been carried away by this error——"

"By what right do you call it error?" interrupted the other with a flash of his eyes.

"We will not discuss it. It will do no good, and it is likely to do harm. I need not be told that you belong to the hostiles, and, if trouble comes, will fight against the whites."

"Yes, you are right," calmly replied the Ogalalla, compressing his thin lips and nodding his head a single time.

"Your father and brother, whom I have never seen, would shoot me and my folk if they had the chance."

"Yes, and so would my mother: she is a warrior too."

"But suppose you and I or my father meet, or you have a chance to harm my mother and little sister Edith?"

"Wolf Ear can never raise his hand against *them*, no matter what harm they may seek to do him. I do not have to tell you that you and I will always be friends, whatever may come."

This assurance would have had more weight with young Kingsland

could he have felt certain that Wolf Ear was truthful in declaring that he did not suspect his identity at the moment of firing at him."

"I believe he meant to take my life," was his thought, "and still meant to do so, when he raised his Winchester a second time, but as we looked into each other's faces, he weakened. His people are treacherous, and this pretense of goodwill will not last, or, if it be genuine for the present, it will soon change."

After a short pause, Brinton said:

"You know where we live, Wolf Ear: I have set out to ride to the reservation to learn whether it is safe to stay where we are. What is your judgment in the matter?"

An indefinable expression passed over the broad face before him. The Ogalalla sat gracefully on his horse, even though he had no saddle. A bit was in the pony's mouth, the single rein looping around the neck and resting at the base of the mane, just in front of the rider, who allowed it to lie there, while the two hands idly held the rifle across the back of the animal and his own thighs.

"You stayed too long," he said; "you should have left two weeks ago; *it is too late now.*"

"But you know my father is not well, Wolf Ear," replied Brinton, with a sickening dread in his heart.

"What has that to do with this?"

"We did not wish to expose him to the severe weather, as we must in the ride to the agency."

"Is he better and stronger now?"

"There is little improvement in his condition. He has been ailing a long time, as you know."

"Then you have gained nothing and will lose all by your delay."

Brinton had no further wish to discuss the ghost dance and the coming of the new Messiah with the young Ogalalla. All his thoughts were of those dear ones, miles away, whose dreadful peril he now fully comprehended for the first time. He saw the mistake that had been made by the delay, and a faintness came over him at the declaration of Wolf Ear that this delay was fatal.

His horse was facing the northwest, the direction of his home. There was no call for longer tarrying.

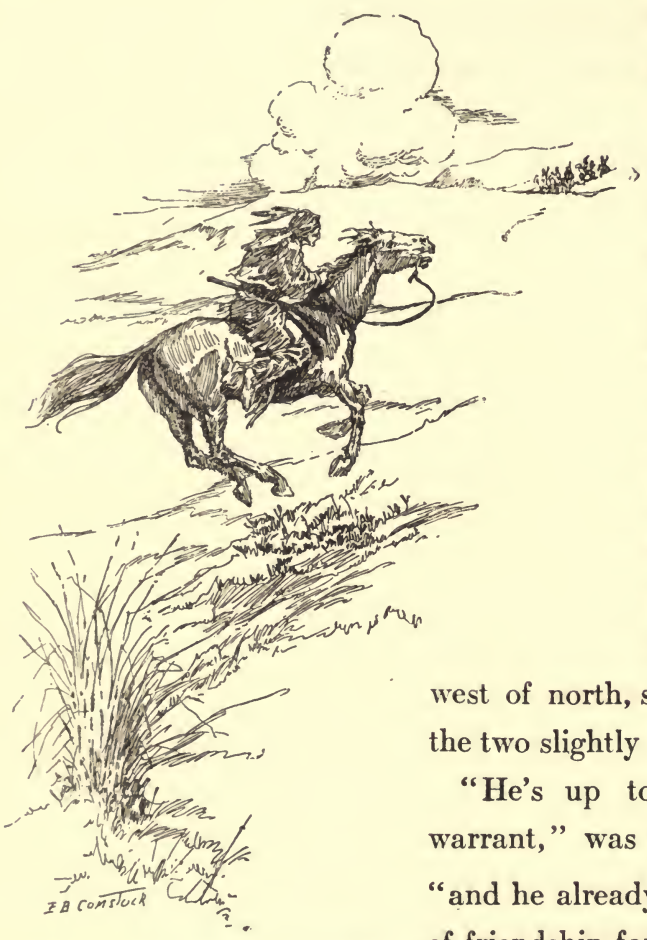
"Good-bye," he said, giving the Indian a military salute; "I hope we shall meet in more pleasant circumstances, when you shall see, Wolf Ear, the mistake you are making."

Trained in the ways of the white people, the dusky youth raised his hand to his forehead, and sat motionless on his horse, without speaking, as his friend dashed across the plain, over the trail which he had followed to the banks of the Big Cheyenne.

It was not yet noon, and Brinton was hopeful of reaching home long before the day drew to a close. The chilliness of the air continued, and a few feathery flakes of snow drifted horizontally on the wind or were whirled about the head of the young horseman. He glanced up at the leaden sky and noted that the temperature was falling.

"Like enough we shall have one of those blizzards, when the horses and cattle freeze to death under shelter and we can only huddle and shiver around the fire and wait for the tempest to pass. It will be death for all of us, if we start for the agency and are caught in one of the blizzards, but death a waits us if we stay. Ah me, what will become of father, ill and weak as he is?"

The words of Wolf Ear made the youth more circumspect and alert than when riding away from his home. He continually glanced ahead



"He's up to some mischief, I'll warrant."

on his right and left, and to the rear. The first look in the last direction showed him the young Ogalalla sitting like a statue on his pony and gazing after him.

Some minutes later, when Brinton turned his head again he saw him riding at a rapid pace towards the north, or rather a little west of north, so that the courses of the two slightly diverged.

"He's up to some mischief, I'll warrant," was Brinton's conclusion, "and he already recalls his profession of friendship for me. Halloa! I don't like the look of that."

In the precise direction pursued by the Ogalalla, which was toward Rapid Creek, a tributary of the Big Cheyenne, he discerned several Indian horsemen. They were riding close, and were so mingled together that it was impossible to tell their number. They seemed to be about half a dozen, and were advancing as if to meet Wolf Ear, who must have descried them before Brinton.

"They will soon unite, and when they do he will be the fiercest war-

rior among them. I wonder——" He held his breath a moment, and then could only whisper: "I wonder if they have not already visited our home?"

CHAPTER THREE

"THERE WERE FIFTY HOSTILES"

TO the westward the Black Hills thrust their vast rugged summits against the wintry sky; to the south, a spur of the same mountains put out toward the frontier town of Buffalo Gap; to the northeast wound the big Cheyenne, on its way to the Missouri, and marking through a part of its course the southern boundary of the Cheyenne Reservation, while creek, stream, and river crossed the rolling plain that intervened, and over all stretched the sunless sky, from which the snowflakes were eddying and whirling to the frozen earth below.

But Brinton Kingsland had no eye for any of these things, upon which he had looked many a time and oft. His thoughts were with those loved ones in the humble cabin, still miles away, toward the towering mountains, while his immediate anxiety was about the hostiles that had appeared in his front and were now circling to the northward as if to meet Wolf Ear, the young Ogalalla, who was galloping in the face of the biting gale and rapidly drawing toward them.

Brinton's expectation that they would lose no time in coming together was not precisely fulfilled, for while the horsemen were yet a long way off, they swerved sharply, as though they identified the youth for the first time.

"They intend to give me some attention," was his thought "without waiting for Wolf Ear to join them. They know that I belong to the white race and that is enough."

The youth did not feel any special alarm for himself, for he was confident that Jack was as fleet-footed as any of the animals bestrode by the hostiles, and would leave them behind in a fair race. He noticed that the Ogalalla was mounted on a superior beast, but he did not believe it could outspeed Jack.

The humble cabin, miles away toward the towering mountains

But it would never do to meet those half-dozen horsemen that had faced toward him, and were approaching at the same swinging gallop. Brinton diverged more to the left, thus leaving the trail, and they also changed their course, as if to head him off.

"If it is to be a race, I am throwing away my chances by helping to shorten the distance between us."

The fugitive now headed directly away from the horsemen, so that both parties were pursuing the same line. The youth looked back, at the moment that several blue puffs of smoke showed over the backs of the horses. The thudding reports came through the chilly air, and a peculiar whistling sound overhead left no doubt that the hostiles, great

as was the separating space, had fired at the fugitive, who turned to take a look at Wolf Ear.

That individual discharged his gun the next moment. Brinton heard nothing of the bullet, but smiled grimly. "He has changed his mind soon, but they have got to come closer before they hurt me. He is no great marksman anyway, or he would not have missed me a little while ago."

It was singular that it did not occur to young Kingsland that it was possible the Ogalalla had not fired at him at all. Not even when the horsemen checked their pursuit, and, reigning up their animals awaited the coming of the buck, who was riding like a hurricane, could he bring himself to think of Wolf Ear except as a bitter enemy, who for some subtle purpose of his own had declared a temporary truce.

"I suppose they think I shall be along this way again pretty soon, and they can afford to wait till I run into their trap," was the conclusion of the boy, who headed his pony once more toward his home, and put him to his best paces.

"Come, Jack, there's no time to throw away; hard work is before you, and you must struggle as never before."

The snowfall which seemed for ever impending did not come. The few scattering flakes still circled and eddied through the air, as if reluctant to touch the earth, but no perceptible increase appeared in their number. The nipping air seemed to have become too cold to permit a snowstorm.

Brinton had set out fully prepared for just such a chage of temperature. He wore a thick woollen cap, whose flaps were drawn down to his ears, while they were more than met by the heavy coat collar that was turned up, the garment itself being closely buttoned around his

body. His rifle rested across the pommel of his saddle in front, and his gloved hand scarcely ever touched the rein which lay loose on his pony's neck. He was a capital horseman, and, with the understanding between him and his intelligent beast, could have got along without any bit at all.

Strapped behind him was a substantial lunch, and his keen appetite would have made it enjoyable, but he did not disturb it. It could wait until he learned the truth about the folk at home, which he was now rapidly drawing near.

Over a swell in the prairie, across a small creek, whose icy waters hardly came above Jack's fetlocks, up a second rise, and then Brinton Kingsland uttered an exclamation of amazement and sharply checked his pony.

"My gracious! what is the meaning of that?"

Over another swell, and only a few hundred yards away, two other horses rode to view, coming directly toward him. Each bore on its back a heavily muffled figure, and they were moving at a rapid walk.

Suspecting their identity, he waited a moment, and then started his horse forward again. A few paces, and despite the artic temperature, he raised his cap from his head and called out:

"Hurrah! Thank Heaven you are alive, and have started for the Agency."

His father sat on one horse, swathed in heavy clothing, and a blanket which the faithful wife had fastened around his emaciated and weak form, while she, with Edith in front, and both protected against the severe weather, were on the other animal. He had a rifle across his saddle front, like the son, and they had brought with them nothing but a small amout of food, barely enough to last them until they could

reach the agency, provided there was no unexpected delay on the road. The discovery that they were alive and secure for the time, though the shadow of a great peril was over all, so delighted the son that he could not repress the shout of joy, as he rode forward and greeted them, little more than their eyes and noses showing through the thick coverings.

"What made you leave before I got back?" was Brinton's first inquiry, after a few congratulatory words.

"We concluded it was high time to do so," replied the father, showing more vigor in his voice than the son had expected.

"How did you find out?"

"A half-dozen hostiles fired several times at the house, and, then, as if they feared they were not strong enough to capture us and burn the cabin, rode off for help."

"They are hardly out of sight now; they gave me half a dozen shots, and I had a short chase with them. But you are off the trail."

"And so are you," replied his father.

"Which is a mighty good thing for us both. You had to abandon everything?"

"Of course; I have no doubt though," he added grimly, "that the Indians will look after the live stock for us."

"Whom do you think I saw?" asked Brinton, turning to his mother and sister.

"A big bear," ventured Edith from the depths of her wrappings.

"No; he was an old friend of yours—Wolf Ear, who used to come to our house and have such good times with you."

The excited child flung her arms about in the effort to free herself of the encumbering wrappings.

He raised his cap from his head and called out: "Hurrah!"—Page 27

"Oh, where is he? Why didn't he come with you? Didn't he want to see me? I am so sorry; isn't he with you?"

And she peered around, as if she suspected the young Ogalalla was hiding behind the saddle of her brother.

Brinton smiled, and then gravely shook his head. He said, addressing his parents more than the little one:

"I was never more astonished than to find that Wolf Ear, despite the training he has had at Carlisle, has joined the hostiles, and is now an enemy of those who were such good friends of his."

The youth did not think it wise to tell, in the presence of his sister, the particulars of their first meeting.

"You grieve me more than I can express," replied the father; "are you sure you are not mistaken?"

"I am not mistaken when he told me this himself."

"But you must have met as friends."

"He said he would not harm any one of us, if the fortunes of war should give him a chance; but he declares himself an enemy of all others of our race. He has a twin brother, and he and his father and mother, as Wolf Ear coolly told me, would be pleased to scalp us. I have no more faith in him than in them. We parted friends, but he has joined that very party which fired on you, and will go back to the house with them."

"And finding us gone, what then?"

"He will lead them on our trail and be among the foremost to shoot us down, every one of us."

"I don't believe it!" called Edith from her wrappings, which her mother had fastened around her again. "I like Wolf Ear and want to see him."

Brinton did not think it worth while to discuss the matter with his little sister, for a far more important matter pressed upon them.

"It won't do to follow the trail," remarked the father, "since they will be on the lookout for us. We will bear to the south, so as to strike the Cheyenne further up the stream."

"We may not be able to ford it."

"We can follow it down till we find a place. It may be frozen over nearer its source. The agency is so far away that we shall have to go into camp before we get half way there."

"How do you feel, father?" abruptly asked his son, glancing keenly at him. "Are you strong enough to stand this hard ride?"

"I am much stronger than you would suppose. You know a crisis like this will rouse any man, even if he is a good deal more ill than I."

"I am glad to hear you talk that way, but you will be tired before we reach Pine Ridge."

"Give yourself no uneasiness about me; the only thing we are to think about is how we shall get to the agency without meeting with the hostiles, who seem to be roaming everywhere."

While they sat talking, at the base of the swell, on the summit of which the parents had first appeared, all partook of lunch, for it was not likely they would have a more favorable opportunity before the coming of night.

It was decided to bear still more to the south, with a view of avoiding the party that was at no great distance. Indeed, less than half an hour had passed since they vanished from the view of the youth, who believed they were waiting in the vicinity of the trail for his return, and would attack the whites the moment they discovered them.

The halt lasted little more than a quarter of an hour, when they

resumed their journey toward the agency, which they hoped, rather than expected, to reach by the morrow's set of sun. The mother was without any weapon, though she was quite skilful in the use of a rifle. Her husband said that if he found himself compelled to yield to weakness, he would turn over the Winchester to her, believing as he did that she was sure to give a good account of herself.

They were plentifully supplied with cartridges, but the reader does not need to be reminded of their almost helpless situation. Kingsland depite his brave efforts to keep up, was unable to ride his pony at full speed for any length of time, while the wife, burdened with the care of Edith, could not expect to do much better.

If the company were attacked by any party of hostiles, however slight in numbers, deplorable consequences were almost certain. Their hope would be in finding some sort of shelter which might be turned to account as a screen or barricade.

But their only safety, it may be said, lay in avoiding the Indians altogether. and it was to that task that Brinton, as the strongest one of the party, addressed himself with all the energy and skill of his nature.

The course was up and down continually, though none of the swells in the prairie was of much height. The youth rode slightly in advance and never made his way to the top of one of the slight elevations without a quicker throbbing of the heart and a misgiving which made the situation of the most trying nature.

It was the dread of the hostiles, with whom Wolf Ear had joined himself, that led him to make a longer bend to the south than even his father had contemplated. True, as he well knew, they were not the sole Indians to be dreaded, but they were the only ones of whom he had positive knowledge. Others were likely to be encountered at any time,

and it may be said that as they drew nearer the agency, the peril was increasing.

A half-dozen miles from where the family had been united, they approached a higher elevation than any that had yet been crossed. Brinton asked the rest to halt at the base, while he dismounted and carefully went to the top on foot.

It was well he took this precaution, for his friends, who were watching his crouching figure as he cautiously went up the incline, saw him abruptly halt and peer over the ridge, in a way which showed he had seen something. He remained but a minute, when he hurried back, pale and excited.

"There are fifty hostiles!" he exclaimed in an undertone, "and they are only a little way off!"

CHAPTER FOUR

"WE ARE ENEMIES"

BRINTON KINGSLAND, after peering over the crest of the elevation for a few brief moments, turned and hastily descended to where his pony awaited him. Without touching his bridle, he spoke and the obedient animal followed him, while the parents and little sister anxiously listened to the report of what he had learned.

"It's the very party of Indians that we have been trying to get away from," added the youth to his first explanation; "there are seven of them, and Wolf Ear is among them."

"Is he?" eagerly asked Edith, from her wrappings on the saddle in front of her mother. "Oh, let me see him! Tell him that I am here."

"Keep quiet! Don't speak!" said her father sternly. "Wolf Ear is with bad Indians, and is a bad Indian himself."

The child would have protested, but for her father's manner. He could be firm when he chose, and she knew better than to disobey him, but she pouted just a little, as she nestled down by her mother, who shared, to some extent, her faith in the Ogalalla who had spent so many hours under their roof.

"What are they doing?" asked Mr. Kingsland of his son.

"They act queerly; the party are drawn up together, and looking off in the direction of the trail to the agency, over which they expect us to pass."

"They are on the watch for us, of course: how far away do you judge the trail to be?"

"Several miles; it seems odd to me that they should ride so far south, instead of staying nearer to it."

"It is plain enough to me; they fear that if we caught sight of them as we should be sure to do, we would hurry back to the house, where they would have less chance against us. By keeping hidden, so that we could not discover our danger until too far away from home, they could ride in behind us and cut off our escape in that direction. But how are we to escape them?"

"We passed an arroya a little way back; let us take to that, and there isn't a minute to lose."

The youth hastily climbed into the saddle, and turned Jack's nose about, so that he went back directly over his own hoof-prints. A little distance, and they struck a narrow valley-like depression, which wound further to the south than the course they were pursuing at the moment of the startling interruption. He entered this at once, the others directly at his heels, the animals walking fast, but with a silence that made one suspect they understood the danger that threatened all.

The arroya, as it is termed in some parts of the country, was a narrow, straight passage, resembling a gully, between banks a dozen feet high. It looked as if it had been washed out years before, by some violent rush of waters, which soon ran itself dry, leaving the abrupt banks facing each other, at varying distances of from ten to fifty feet.

In some places these banks of clay were perpendicular, so that a horse, once within the gorge, could not leave it at many points, while in others, the dirt had tumbled in to an extent which made it easy for him to climb out.

The course of the arroya was devious, and there was no saying when it would terminate by rising to the level of the plain. At most, it could be but a temporary refuge for the fugitives.

The thought occurred to both father and son that the Indians must soon discover this refuge, which would be welcome to them and their animals while the piercing blast was sweeping across the prairie. The eddying snow had almost ceased, but the wind blew fitfully, and whenever it touched the face or bare hand, it was like a needle of ice. The American Indian is one of the toughest of creatures, but he does not disdain shelter for himself and beast from the merciless blizzard or the driving tempest. Many of those gathered about Pine Ridge, during the critical days in '90–'91, found protection in the pockets of earth in the gullies, where they peered out like wild animals on the alert for a chance to spring at the blue-coated sentinel, without risk to themselves.

If the arroya should hold its general course southward for several miles, the little party might successfully escape the hostiles, who intruded between them and the agency. The afternoon was wearing away and the night would be moonless and starless. Our friends hoped, if they escaped until then, to lessen greatly the distance between themselves and Pine Ridge.

A quarter or a third of a mile through the winding gully, and Brinton drew rein, and waited until his parents rode up beside him.

"I wonder what has become of them?" was his inquiring remark.

"What does it matter?" asked his mother in turn, "so long as we can not see them? We must be a good way from them now."

"I wish I could think so, but I can't feel easy while riding in this blind fashion. There may be greater danger in front than we have left behind."

"What do you propse to do?" asked the father.

"Take a look round and learn, if I can, how things are going."

Without explaining further, the youth swung himself down once more from the saddle, and hurried to the edge of the arroya on his left. There was a spot so sloping that after a little work, with the dirt crumbling under his feet, he reached the level above, and was able to peer over a great deal of the surrounding prairie without exposing himself.

North, south, east, and west the youth bent his keen vision

The result ought to have been gratifying, but it was hardly that. North, south, east, and west the youth bent his keen vision, but not a sign of the dreaded hostiles was to be seen. They were as invisible as though they had never been.

Had the distance traveled by the fugitives since their fright been twice or thrice as great, this must have been the best of omens, but the space was not far, and it was almost self-evident that the band was still in the neighborhood.

"But where are they?" was the question on the lips of father and son as they discussed the situation, and in the minds of both trembled

the same answer: the hostiles were in the same arroya itself, behind the fugitives.

"They have ridden down the bank," said the parent, "to shelter their ponies from the icy blast, and are there now."

"Will they be likely to suspect that we have been this way?" asked the mother.

"They can not fail to notice the hoof-prints we have left," replied her husband, "and that will tell the story as plainly as if they sat on the bank as we rode by."

This alarming declaration caused Mrs. Kingsland to cast a terrified glance behind her, as if she expected to see the ferocious redskins burst into view with crack of rifle and ear-splitting shriek.

In the circumstances, there was manifestly but one thing to do—push on with no more delay than was inevitable.

The ground at the bottom of the arroya was comparatively level, and the horses dropped into an easy swinging gallop, which lasted but a few minutes, when Mr. Kingsland called in a faint voice, as he brought his animal down to a walk:

"Hold on, Brinton!"

"What is the matter?" asked his son, looking at him in dismay.

"I can't stand it; I am not as strong as I thought."

He reeled in his saddle, and the startled son reached out to prevent his falling.

"Forgive me, father. I forgot your illness."

"There—there—I am all right," he murmured, putting his hand to his face, in the effort to master his weakness.

His wife was also at his side, anxious and alarmed.

"Hugh, I fear you have undertaken more than you can do," she

said, laying her hand affectionately on his arm, and peering into as much of his face as was visible through the thick wrappings.

He made no reply, and it was plain that he was nearly fainting. There was nothing his friends could do for him, except to help him out of the saddle, but they were about to propose that, when a slight but alarming accident took place.

The Winchester, resting across the saddle-bow and hitherto grasped in the mittened hand of the man, slipped from his relaxed fingers and fell to the earth. The lock struck in such a way that a chamber was discharged, the bullet burying itself in the bank which Brinton had climbed only a few minutes before.

The explosion roused Edith, who was sinking into a doze, and imparted to the man himself such a shock that his growing faintness gave instant place to renewed strength. He straightened up and said:

"Gracious! that's too bad; *they* must have heard it."

"We can't tell about that; are you feeling stronger?"

"Yes; let's push on; we must lose no time."

Brinton longed to force the animals into a gallop, but dared not, after what had just taken place. But they were pushed to a rapid walk, which was kept up some ten or fifteen minutes, when came another sudden halt, for the good reason that they had reached the end of the arroya.

That singular formation, after winding about for a long distance, rose to the level of the prairie and then disappeared.

To proceed further must be done by exposure to any hostiles in the neighborhood. Brinton stopped and looked inquiringly at his father.

"As near as I can judge," said the latter, "we are close to the Big

Cheyenne; we ought to cross that early this evening and keep on to the White, which should be reached by daylight; then the ride is not far to Pine Ridge."

"Night is near; we will wait awhile; the rest will do you good, and I will take a look over our own trail."

Leaving his family to themselves, Brinton headed back and struck Jack into a moderate gallop through the arroya.

He was uneasy over that accident with his father's Winchester. If heard by the keen-eared hostiles they would start an investigation, and it could have but one result.

"They must have heard it," was his belief, "and if so, they knew where it came from. It won't take them long to learn its meaning—halloa! what's the matter, Jack?"

More than once the sagacity of his animal had warned the youth of the approach of danger. The pony dropped into a walk so quickly that the rider was thrown slightly forward in the saddle. Then the animal pricked up his ears, took a few more steps and then halted.

"That means something," thought Brinton, bringing his rifle round to the front and making ready to use it on the instant if needed. He softly drew the mitten from his right hand.

The gully turned sharply to the left, just ahead, and he knew that Jack had scented danger. But, if so, minute after minute passed and it did not appear. The youth became perplexed, and was in sore doubt whether to push on a little further or turn back.

He gently twitched the rein and touched his heels against the ribs of his pony. He advanced a couple of paces, and stopped as abruptly as before, his head still up, his ears erect, while the snuffing nostrils showed that he was wiser than his rider.

He came face to face with an Indian horseman.—Page 42

"I'll be hanged if I don't learn the meaning of this," muttered Brinton Kingsland, who, with less discretion than he generally showed, swung himself out of the saddle and moved stealthily forward, resolved to learn the cause of Jack's alarm.

He learned it soon enough, for he had barely time to pass part way round the curve in the arroya, which was unusually winding at that portion, when he came face to face with an Indian horseman.

The Indian's horse, quite as sagacious as Jack, had detected the presence of a stranger beyond the turn, and halted until the latter revealed himself, or his master reached a decision upon the line to pursue.

Brinton's great blunder was in moving so impatiently through the gully that he was revealed too soon to draw back. Thus it was that it may be said he almost precipitated himself upon the buck before he saw him.

It would be hard to describe Brinton's emotions when on the first startled glance at the solitary Indian he recognized him as Wolf Ear, whom he had encountered but a little while before. The Indian was looking fixedly at him, and something like a smile lit up his broad, coppery face.

"Thus we meet, Brinton," he said in his low voice; "will you come forward and shake hands?"

"Why should I shake hands?" asked the youth, thoroughly distrustful of the Ogalalla; "we are enemies."

"That is for you to decide," was the cool remark of the Indian youth.

He made as if to ride away, when Brinton interposed:

"Your actions do not agree with your words."

"And why not?"

"After parting from me, you rode away and joined my enemies."

To the amazement of the youth, the young Ogalalla without a word wheeled about and galloped out of sight up the arroya.

CHAPTER FIVE

"WHAT WILL BE THEIR NEXT STEP?"

BRINTON KINGSLAND was in the saddle again on the instant and his pony dashed down the arroya at full speed.

"Wolf Ear has hurried back to tell the rest that he has seen us, and they will be here in a few minutes," was the belief that lent wings to his speed.

It was a comparatively short ride to where his friends awaited him. A minute sufficed for them to learn the alarming tidings.

"It won't do to delay another second: come on!"

The next moment the two horses followed the youth out of the gully upon the plain.

"Can you stand it, father?" he asked, holding his pony back and looking inquiringly at him.

"Yes, my son, don't think of me," was the brave response, as the man struck his animal into a gallop.

The mother was a capital horsewoman, and little Edith, who was now fully awake, once more accommodated herself to her position, so as to save all embarrassment so far as she was concerned.

Child-like, she wanted to ask innumerable questions, but she was intelligent enough to understand that silence was expected of her and she held her peace, wondering, perplexed and frightened.

The wintry afternoon was wearing to a close. The sky maintained its heavy leaden hue, the wind blew fitfully, and was of piercing keen-

ness, and the occasional snow-flakes whirling about the heads of the fugitives, were more like hailstones than the soft, downy particles which had appeared earlier in the afternoon. The view was shortened in the gathering gloom, and the anxious eyes glancing around the different points of the compass, and especially to the rear, failed to reveal the dreadful horsemen from whom they were fleeing.

The hope of the little party lay in keeping out of sight of their enemies until night. With no moon and stars to guide them, the hostiles could not keep their trail, which our friends were sure to make as winding as possible.

As the night approached, their hopes increased. Darkness was closing in when they reached the bank of the Big Cheyenne, and for the first time since leaving the arroya, they drew rein.

"This is better than I dared expect," said the father in high spirits, and seemingly strengthened by his sharp ride through the cutting cold; "I can hardly understand it."

"I suspect that Wolf Ear has made a blunder."

"In what way?"

"He did not think that we would leave the gully before night; he went back and told the rest. They dared not attack us where we had some show to defend ourselves; they will not discover our flight until it is too late."

While there seemed reason in this belief, it did not fully satisfy the father. It was not in keeping with the subtlety of the American Indian that they should allow a party of whites to ride directy away from them, when they were at their mercy. Any one of the hostiles, by climbing the side of the arroya was sure to see the little company of

fugitives emerge therefrom, and it was inconceivable that they should not take this simple precaution.

"There is something beyond all this, which has not yet appeared," he said; "neither Wolf Ear nor his companions are fools."

At their feet the river swept by in the gathering darkness. The current was not swift, but pieces of ice lay against the shores, and floated past in the middle of the stream. The opposite bank could hardly be seen in the gloom.

"Must we cross that?" asked Mrs. Kingsland, as the horses halted on the margin of the icy waters.

"Yes," replied her husband, "and twenty miles further we must cross the White, to say nothing of smaller streams, which may be as deep and more difficult. Pine Ridge lies fifty miles away, and there's no going round any of the water."

"It will be the death of us to swim our horses," she said with a shudder; "we shall freeze to death."

"That is not to be thought of," Brinton hastened to explain. "While the Cheyenne has many deep places at this season, there are others where a horse can wade across without wetting one's stirrups."

"How are we to know such fords?"

"By trying, and there's no better place than this; wait till I make the attempt."

With commendable promptness he urged Jack forward, and the animal, understanding what was required of him, stepped among the pieces of ice along the bank. He slipped on one, and Edith uttered a cry of alarm.

"Look out, Brint! You will fall into the water."

"Don't fret about me," he called back.

A few reassuring words to his pony, who hesitated and sniffed, as if about to draw back, and he continued his cautious advance into the stream, the others anxiously watching his progress.

Should the water prove deep enough to force the steed to swim, it would never do, for that would necessitate the saturation of the garments of all, which meant freezing to death.

Ten steps from the bank, and the water touched Brinton's stirrups

As long as the ponies maintained a sure footing, even though the water crept well up their sides, the riders could guard themselves against the dreaded wetting. Brinton, therefore, ventured into the stream with the utmost care, his animal feeling every step of the way. Ten steps from the bank, and the water touched Brinton's stirrups. He withdrew his feet and held them out of reach. He was so excellent a horseman that, by the pressure of his knees, he sat almost as firmly in the saddle as if with the support of his feet.

"Be careful, Jack; slowly,—slowly—slowly!"

Jack was sniffing with his neck outstretched and his nose almost on

the surface of the water. The breath issued like steam through his thin silken nostrils, and he paid no heed to the triangular piece of jagged ice which struck his hind legs with a sharp thrust, and then swung clear. He knew his duty, and was doing his level best.

The rider turned his head and looked back. The forms of his father and mother on their motionless horses were dim, and growing more indistinct in the approaching night.

Seeing him turn his head, his father called something in a guarded undertone, which the son did not catch, but, believing it was simply a request from him to be careful, he replied, "All right," and went on with the work in hand.

Several steps further, and the water had not perceptibly deepened. Brinton, indeed, was inclined to think it had slightly shallowed.

"We are pretty near the middle, and it begins to look as if I had struck the right spot after all. Hallao! what's up now?"

Jack had stopped just as he did in the arroya, and with the same appearance of alarm.

"Can it be that you have scented a deep place in front and want to save me from a bath?"

Brinton checked the light question on his lips, for at the moment of uttering it his own vision answered the query in a manner that fairly lifted the cap from his head.

A horseman was advancing through the water from the other side of the Cheyenne. He was several rods away, but near enough for the youth to recognize him as an Indian warrior. He had entered the icy stream, as if to meet the other, who in the same glance that identified him dimly discerned more horsemen on the bank beyond.

As in the former instance, Jack had discovered the peril before his

With a wild cry the Indian rolled from his pony.—Page 50

master, and halted, not through fear of a chilling bath, but because of a tenfold greater danger stealing upon them.

It looked as if the hostiles from whom they were stealing had come towards the river from beyond, and were again between them and safety.

If so the question might well be asked what was meant by this extraordinary behavior of the red men? Why did they not conceal themselves until the fugitives rode directly into their arms? Why take this risk of sending one of their number to meet an enemy in mid-stream, where, despite whatever advantage the savage possessed, he could not help yielding a portion of it to his foe?

But it was a moment for action and not for conjecture and vain speculation.

In the same moment that Brinton recognized the horseman immediately in front as his foe, he observed that his pony had also halted and the rider was in the act of bringing his weapon to his shoulder.

The mitten was snatched from the youth's right hand and thrust into the pocket of his coat. He had no time to slip the other off, nor was it necessary, since that only supported the rifle. He hastily raised his Winchester to a level, and, knowing that everything depended on who was the quicker, he took instant aim at the centre of the dark figure and let fly.

With a wild cry the Indian rolled from his pony, and disappeared in the dark waters. His animal, with a snort of alarm, whirled about and dashed to shore, sending the spray flying in all directions.

"Quick, Jack! back with you!"

Brinton flung himself on his pony's neck, and the wise animal seemed to spin about on his hind feet as he galloped furiously through

the water for the shore he had just left. Nothing but this precaution and the deepening gloom saved the daring youth from death. It took a few precious seconds for the hostiles on the other bank to comprehend what had taken place, and when they began firing the form of the horse and his rider were fast vanishing from sight.

But the bullets were whistling perilously near his parents, who did not quite understand what had taken place.

"Move further down the bank!" called Brinton in a guarded undertone; "quick! don't stop to ask why, but do as I say."

The parents obeyed, and a minute or two was sufficient to take them out of range.

"Follow them, Jack, and move lively!"

The pony obeyed promptly, and he too passed beyond danger for the time.

The darkness was too deep for the persons on either bank to discern the others across the stream. The hostiles kept up their firing, in a blind way, hoping that some of their shots might reach the fugitive. Brinton had lain down on the shore, so as to decrease the danger of being struck by any of the stray bullets. He could tell where the others were by the flash of their guns, but deemed it best not to fire for the present, through fear of betraying his own position.

The dropping shots continued for a few minutes and then suddenly stopped. It was impossible to tell in the gloom what his enemies were doing, but he suspected the truth. They were preparing to ford the river, with a view of bringing the combatants to close quarters.

Peering intensely into the night, Brinton made out the faint outline of a horseman feeling his way across, and did not doubt that others were close behind him. This must be a particularly favorable ford,

else the hostiles would try some other, if they knew of any in the immediate vicinity.

It was necessary to check this advance, if he expected to save the dear ones with him. The moment, therefore, he made sure of the object approaching, he sighted as best he could and blazed away, instantly shifting his position to escape the return shot which he knew would be quick in coming.

It was well he did so; for the flash and report of several rifles and the whistling of the bullets told of the peril escaped by a very narrow margin.

There was no reason to think that his own shot had been fatal, for there was no outcry, nor did the listening ear detect any splash in the water, such as marked his first essays when in mid-stream; but he had accomplished that which he sought—he had checked the advance, which otherwise might have been fatal to him and his family. The form of the horseman disappeared in the gloom. He had returned to the shore whence he came, and it was safe to conclude that he would not soon repeat the attempt.

"What will be their next step?" was the question that presented itself to the young defender of the ford.

It was not to be expected that they would try to cross in the face of the certain reception that awaited them.

"They know more of the Cheyenne than we do," Brinton Kingsland thought, "and must be aware of some place where they can reach this side without danger. If they do succeed in coming over, there will be trouble."

He dared not wait long, for nothing was to be gained, while he ran the risk of losing everything. Only the sound of the rushing water,

and the crunching of the ice reached his ear. Rising to his feet and peering into the gloom, he could discern nothing of his foes.

"There's no need of my staying here," he decided, starting along the stream in quest of his parents.

When he had passed a hundred yards without seeing them, he was astonished. Another hundred, and still they were invisible, and the cautious signals he made remained unanswered.

CHAPTER SIX

"AY, WHERE WERE THEY?"

BY the unaccountable disappearance of his parents and the horses, Brinton was left in a state rather of perplexity than alarm. The time was so brief since they left him, that he could not understand how they had gone far, nor why they did not answer the guarded calls he made.

He noticed that when in obedience to his urgent entreaties the couple rode away, followed by his own pony, they went down stream, that is, in the direction of the current. Surely they could not have passed any distance, and he believed they heard his voice, when, making a funnel with his mittened hands, he pronounced the words:

"Father! Mother! Where are you?"

If they did not reply, it was because of the danger involved in doing so. It was incautious on his part to shout, even in a suppressed voice, at such a time.

The bank on his left was a little higher than his head, and so sloping that the horses could climb out with little effort; but, as will be remembered, the night was unusually dark, and he might pass over the plainest trail without knowing it.

He ran some distance further, keeping close to the water, but still failed to find them.

"They have climbed out of the bed of the stream; something has unexpectedly occurred, or they would not leave me in this manner."

He felt his way to the bank, and easily placed himself upon the level ground above. There he strove to pierce the gloom, but nothing rewarded the effort.

"Well, I'll be hanged," he muttered, "if this isn't the greatest surprise I ever had. It looks as if the ground had opened and swallowed them."

In the northern sky the heavy gloom was relieved by a faint glow, which at first he took for the aurora borealis, but a few minutes' scrutiny convinced him that it was the light of some burning building, the dwelling, evidently, of some ranchman, whose family had probably paid with their lives the penalty of tarrying too long.

"A few hours more, and father, mother and Edith would have, no doubt, shared the same fate. It may still be theirs so to do."

The sound of a whinny from behind caused him to turn his head. He could see nothing, but he was sure it was one of his father's ponies that thus made known his presence.

It would have been the height of imprudence, however, had he acted upon such a belief, after what had so recently occurred, and when a safe and certain test was at his command.

He emitted a low, tremulous whistle of such a musical tone that it reached a goodly distance in spite of the gale.

"That can be heard further than the neigh, and, if it finds Jack's ear, no one can restrain him from coming to me."

But though the call was repeated, there was no response. The alarming conclusion was unavoidable: the sound had been made by an Indian pony near at hand.

Aware that his own situation, despite the darkness, was perilous, the

youth sat down on the frosty earth, near the edge of the bank, until he could gain some idea of his bearings.

Within the next ten seconds the whinny was repeated, and this time seemingly within a dozen feet, but below the bank, and consequently between him and the water.

He knew what it meant: the hostiles had crossed the stream lower down, and were ascending it in the search for the fugitives. But for the fact that one of their ponies showed a strange lack of training, the boy would have run right into them.

It might be that the reckless horse was a captured one!

They were so close, however, that Brinton did not dare to flee, especially as he did not know in what direction safety lay. He lay flat on the earth, with his head just above the edge of the bank, so that had there been any light he could have seen what was going on below.

It is rare that a night is totally devoid of the least ray of illumination. Brinton, therefore, could never believe he was mistaken, when, peering down into the gloom, he fancied he discerned the shadowy outlines of a horseman move slowly in front of him, like a figure in a magic lantern. It melted in the gloom, and then came another and another, until he counted six. The sounds of the hoofs on the hard ground removed the doubt which otherwise he might have had.

"The same party," was his thought; "one is missing, and, if I am not mistaken, I had something to do with his disappearance."

A different noise came to his ears. One of the bucks was making his pony climb the bank where the slope was abrupt. The labor was hard, but, after a strenuous effort, he stood on the earth above. He was followed by the others in Indian file, the ascent taking but a few minutes.

The disturbing feature about this business was that the whole party had climbed the bank within a dozen feet of where Brinton was lying,

and they halted when so near that he was half afraid some of the horses might step on him.

Had there been any light in the sky he would have felt they were trifling with him, as a cat plays with a mouse.

But, if the hostiles could not see him or detect his presence, their horses were sure to discover that a stranger was near.

"It's too bad!" thought Brinton, who, believing that his own people were safe, was able to give more thought to himself; "it looks as if there's no getting rid of them. I think this is a good time for me to leave."

For a single moment he was certain he was discovered. One of the warriors uttered an exclamation, and a slight sound showed that he had dropped from his horse to the ground. The youth was on the point of rolling over the edge of the bank and taking to his heels, in the hope that the darkness would allow him to escape, when, to his dismay, a tiny point of light flashed out of the gloom.

One of the hostiles had dismounted to light a cigarette, placing himself so that his horse's body kept off the wind.

Brinton's position gave him a good view of the operation. The savage drew the match along a portion of his blanket. The youth saw the slight explosion followed by the bursting into flame. The buck shielded it with his curving hands, which were raised to meet the stooping head, as it bent forward, with the cigarette between the lips.

The glare of the diminutive flame gave a peculiar tint to the fingers, which caused them to glow is if with heat. Then the reflection showed the arched nose, the broad face, the serpent-like eyes, and a few strag-

gling hairs on the upper lip, with a glimpse of the dangling locks, that were thrown forward by the stoop of the head.

The glimpse was momentary, but it was clear enough for Brinton to recognize the young Indian as Wolf Ear, who he knew was fond of cigarette smoking, that being one of the habits he had acquired among civilized folks.

"I am sorry it wasn't *you* I shot from his horse in mid-stream," was the resentful reflection of him, who had once been the devoted friend of the Ogalalla.

The cigarette lighted, the buck vaulted upon the back of his pony, where he could be seen by the fiery tip in the dense darkness.

Brinton wondered why the group of horsemen remained where they were, instead of riding away. That, like many other actions of theirs, was incomprehensible to him.

But while he lay flat on the ground, debating what he should do next, if indeed he could do anything, he was frightened by the discovery that gradually, but surely, the figures of the Indians and their ponies were coming into view.

The explanation was that the sky, which had been overcast all day and a portion of the night, was slightly clearing—not to any extent, but enough to increase the peril of his own situation to an alarming extent.

"It won't do to stay here any longer; I wonder why they have not discovered me before; they will do it in five minutes, if I remain."

His position was an awkward one for the movement necessary, but he had no choice, and he began stealthily working himself to the edge of the bank, with the purpose of letting himself noiselessly over to where he would be concealed from sight. All might have gone well had

One of the hostiles had dismounted to light a cigarette.—Page 57

he not forgotten a simple thing. The edge of the bank gave way under his weight, and he slid downwards, as if taking a plunge into the river with the dirt rattling after him.

The noise, slight as it was, was sure to attract the attention of the Indians, a few feet away. Brinton knew this, and he did not wait to see results. With the nimbleness of a cat, he turned at the moment of striking the bottom of the low cliff, and, bounding to his feet, ran along below the bank at his utmost speed.

Had he continued his flight, quick disaster must have followed; but with a thoughtfulness and self-possession hardly to be expected, he abruptly stopped after running a hundred feet and again threw himself on his face, at the bottom of the bank, and as close to its base as it was possible for him to lie.

He knew that he could reach this point before the hostiles would comprehend what had taken place, and consequently before they would attempt to pursue him. Since he had no chance against their fleet ponies, he would have been speedily run down had he continued his flight down the river bed, for he heard the sound of their hoofs as they dashed after him.

The pursuers were cunning. Their ears had told them the course he had taken. Several forced their animals down the bank, to prevent his turning back over his own trail, while the others galloped close to the edge above, all the party taking the same direction. Thus it would seem that but one desperate hope remained to him, which was to dash into the river and struggle to the other side. But the splash would betray him. The water was probably deep enough to force him to swim. With the thermometer below zero, and encumbered by his clothing, he must perish with cold, if he did not drown.

Where then was the hope of eluding the hostiles, who were clinging so persistently to his track?"

There was none excepting in the trick to which Brinton had resorted and he knew it.

He was no more than fairly nestled in his hiding-place, when the clatter of hoofs showed that one of the horsemen was almost upon him. He could only hug the base of the bank and pray for the danger to pass. It did pass, but it was sure speedily to return. It was this belief which led the youth to resort to another artifice, that would have done credit to an experienced ranger of the plains.

"My own Jack!"

Instead of turning about and running upstream under the bank, he waited until the horsemen above had also passed, and were invisible in the gloom. Then he hastily clambered up the slight bluff, rattling down the dirt again in a way that sent a shiver through him. Had they

been as near as before, they must certainly have discovered him; but if the noise of the crumbling dirt reached the ears of any, they supposed it was caused by some of their companions, for no effort at investigation was made.

Upon solid ground once more, Brinton sped straight out over the plain and directly away from the river till he dared to pause, look around and listen. He saw nor heard nothing to renew his fear.

"Can it be that I have shaken them off at last?" he asked himself; "it begins to look like it. Where under heaven can the folks be? I hope they have pushed toward the Agency, and nothing will happen to them."

Now it was that he detected something, so faint and indistinct that at first he could not identify it; but, while he wondered and listened, it resolved itself into the sound of a horse's hoofs. They were not such as are made by an animal galloping or trotting, but by walking. Furthermore, he heard but one series of footfalls.

A sudden impulse led Brinton to repeat the whistle which he had vainly tried some time before, when groping along the bank of the Big Cheyenne. Instantly a faint neigh answered, and a pony assumed shape in the darkness as he approached at a joyous trot.

"My own Jack!" exclaimed the overjoyed youth, flinging his arms about the neck of his favorite, and kissing his silken nose; "Heaven be thanked that you are restored to me at last. But where are the folks?"

Ay, where were they?

CHAPTER SEVEN

"IT CAME LIKE ONE OF THEM KANSAN CYCLONES."

AS he was on the point of giving up all hope of ever seeing him again, Brinton Kingsland was naturally overjoyed at meeting his favorite pony. The situation of the young man would have proved a sad one, had he been compelled to wander over the prairie on foot; for he would have been liable to encounter hostiles at any moment.

With the coming of daylight, he could hardly expect to avoid detection by some of the numerous bands galloping hither and thither, ready to pounce upon any defenseless settlers, or to cut off the squads of scouts and soldiers whenever there was a chance of doing so with little peril to themselves.

Jack showed as much delight as his master. He thrust his nose forward, and whinnied softly in response to Brinton's endearments. No doubt he had been searching for his master for some time.

"I tell you old boy, there are only three persons whom I would rather see just now than you; I won't mention their names, for you know them as well as I do. Where are they? Surely they can't be far off?"

An examination of the horse disclosed the fact that his saddle and bridle were in tact, thus proving that he had not been in the hands of any enemies, who indeed would not have allowed him to stray off in this fashion.

Brinton placed his foot in the stirrup, and swung himself astride of

the intelligent beast, who capered with pleasure at feeling his master once more in the saddle. Now that such good fortune had come to the youth, he grew anxious about the dear ones from whom he had been so strangely separated.

There was something in the way in which they had drifted apart which perplexed him. The interval in which it occurred was so brief that he could not believe they were far asunder. The arrival of Jack strengthened this belief, and now that he was in the saddle again, he peered around in the gloom, half hoping and half expecting their forms to take shape and come forward to greet him.

The partial clearing of the sky continued. No snow-flakes drifted against him, but the moaning wind was as biting and frigid as ever. The straining gaze, however, could see nothing of horse or person, though he clung to the belief that they were not far away.

But with the conviction came the other of the nearness of the dreaded red men. He had left them on the bank of the Big Cheyenne, which was not far distant, and failing to find him there, it was natural for them to suspect the trick by which he had escaped.

But nothing was to be done by sitting motionless on his horse. He ventured to pronounce the name of his father and then his mother, increasing the loudness of the tone to an imprudent degree. This was done repeatedly, but no answering call was borne back to him.

Sound could not travel far against the wind on such a blustery night, and they might be within a hundred yards without his being able to hear them or they to hear him.

He had absolutely no guide or clue, and despair began to creep into his heart. He asked himself what the result would be if the aimless wandering should continue through the night.

With the rise of the sun, Pine Ridge would be still a good day's ride away, and it was too much to hope that they would be permitted to gallop unchallenged through the reservation.

"Jack," said he, addressing his pony in the old familiar way to which he was accustomed, "I can do nothing; you will have to help me out. So now show what you can do."

Whether the sagacious animal understood what was asked of him can only be conjectured, but he acted as if he did. He threw up his head, sniffed the air, pricked up his ears, and started off at an easy, swinging gallop. Brinton's heart grew light with hope.

"He must know where he came from; a horse can teach the best hunter at such times, and Jack understands what he is doing."

The pony cantered but a comparatively short way, when he dropped to a rapid walk, which grew slower every moment. It was interesting to see him turn his head and look from side to side, for all the world as if searching for something which he was surprised he did not find.

"You must be near the spot," said his master; "don't make any mistake now, my boy."

He came to a sudden standstill, still turning his head from one side to the other, as if examining every point in sight. There could be no doubt that he was disappointed, as naturally was his rider also.

"I know this is the spot where you left them to join me, but they are gone. I can do nothing; everything depends on you, Jack, and you must not fail me."

He resumed his deliberate walk, which was continued for only a short distance. When he halted finally, his actions said as plainly as words: "I give it up! I've done my best, and, like you, am at my wits' end."

For the second time Brinton pronounced the names of his loved ones, and while doing so, Jack threw up his head, snorted, and trembled violently.

These signs were unmistakable: he had discovered something. His master urged him forward. He obeyed to the extent of a couple of steps, and then refused to go further. Not only that, but he shied to the left, and trembled more than before.

Brinton soothed him, and then leaned over the saddle and looked into the gloom; and as he did so, he almost fell from his seat, because of the shock and faintness from what he saw.

The first glance told him that something was stretched on the frozen earth but a short distance away. Further scrutiny revealed that it was a man lying motionless at full length.

"It is father!" was the thought of the son, who was out of the saddle in a twinkling, and running forward.

It was not the body of Hugh Kingsland, but of a stranger. He had been a powerful man, who had made a brave fight and had only been overcome by superior numbers.

Brinton did not attempt any examination in the darkness, for there was no need to do so. He uttered a prayer for the unfortunate one, and for those whom he must have left behind him, and added:

"Thank Heaven, it is not father! But who can say how soon he, too, shall not be thus cut down with mother and little Edith?"

He remembered that although this tragedy had taken place so near him, and within the last hour or two, he had heard no reports of guns nor any sounds of conflict. That, however, was accounted for by the direction of the wind, as already explained.

Really nothing seemed left for him to do. He had done every-

"It is father!" was the thought of the son."—Page 66

thing in his power to find his friends and failed. As long as night continued the faculty of vision was useless to him.

"Well, Jack," he said despairingly, "do as you choose; I am helpless."

As if in smypathy with his young master, the pony moved off on a slow walk, which he kept up until, by some means, which Brinton hardly understood, he clambered down into a gully, similar to the arroya in which they had taken shelter that afternoon. In doing this, it is probable that the animal was guided by that instinct which often prompts his kind to seek shelter from the severity of the weather, for the refuge was a welcome one to the rider as well as to the pony.

During all this time Brinton had been signaling and calling to his parents, but in vain. The continued failure to get a reply led him to decide that nothing more could be done before morning.

He flung himself off his pony, and made ready to remain where he was until then. The gully was narrow, and the banks at the point where he drew rein were high enough to shut out the gale. Food for himself and horse was out of the question, and neither was suffering for want of it. The Big Cheyenne had given them all the water they wanted; and physically, therefore, nothing in their condition was specially unpleasant.

It would have been a great comfort to have had a fire by which to nestle down, but two causes rendered this impossible: no material was within reach, and, if there had been, he would not have dared to kindle it.

Jack's saddle was removed, and, in obedience to the command of his master, he lay down on the flinty earth, while Brinton disposed himself so as to receive a part of the warmth of his body. Thus, with

the help of his own thick clothing, his situation was more comfortable than would be supposed.

Despite his worry and anxiety, he soon fell asleep, and did not open his eyes again until the grey light of the wintry morning was stealing through the gully. He was chilled and cramped by his exposure, but leaping to his feet, he soon restored his bemnubed circulation. Jack, seeing his master astir, sprang up, and looked at him as if to announce that he was ready for any work that was before them.

"Well, my boy, we shall have to go without our breakfast, but you and I can stand that, I reckon, for this thing must end before we are many hours older——"

"Well, I'll be shot!"

The exclamation was uttered by a horseman, who at that moment rode into sight in the gully and checked his animal only a couple of rods distant, adding—

"I didn't expect to meet you here, Brint; where are the rest of the folks?"

"That's what I would like to know. I am worried to death, Nick; can't you help me?"

"I'll do anything I can, my lad, but what is it?"

The newcomer was Nicholas Jackson, serving as a scout for General Miles. It will be remembered that it was he who stopped at the home of the Kingslands a short time before and warned them of their danger. Had his advice been heeded, they would not have been in such sore straits at this time.

Brinton quickly told of his strange experience of the night before and his perplexity as to what he should do.

"I don't think anything has happened to them," was the reassuring

response of Jackson, "for the darkness was in their favor. They are somewhere in these gullies, hiding just as you did, and dare not show themselves."

"But how are we to find them?"

"There is only one way that I know of—look for them."

"What are you doing here, Nick?"

"We learned at Wounded Knee that a company with supplies was to come from Rapid City and I have been sent out on a scout; an escort is coming to bring them into camp. You have heard of the battle of Wounded Knee Creek, I suppose?"

"Not a word."

The old scout compressed his lips and shook his head.

"I have been in a good many scrimmages under Generals Crook and Miles, but that was the hottest half-hour I ever spent."

"How was it, Nick?"

"You know that the hostiles have been gathering in the Bad Lands ever since this trouble began. We have them pretty well surrounded, but there must be a big fight before we wind up this serious business. Two days before Christmas word reached us that three thousand Indians, including six hundred bucks, were there. You can understand how much relief it was, therefore, to learn that Big Foot, with a lot of Sitting Bull's fugitives on Cherry Creek Reservation, had surrendered to Colonel Sumner.

"That was all well enough, but while conducting the band of two hundred to the Missouri, the next day, the whole lot escaped and hurried south to join Kicking Bear and the rest of the hostiles. Then the trouble began.

"Four days later Little Bat, one of our Indian scouts, discovered

Big Foot and his band eight miles north of Major Whiteside's camp on Wounded Knee Creek, and four troops of the Seventh Cavalry started for them, with me among them.

"As the hostiles spied us they formed a long battle line, all with guns and knives, the knives being carried in their cartridge belts outside their blankets.

"I tell you, Brint, things looked squally. We could see the gleam of their black eyes, and the way they scowled and glared at us showed that nothing would suit them better than to drive their knives to the hilts into every one of us.

"But Major Whiteside meant business. He drew us up, too, in battle line. Just then Big Foot was seen coming forward on foot. The major dropped down from his saddle and went forward to meet him.

The newcomer was Nicholas Jackson

"'Me ill,' said Big Foot. 'Me want peace—my people want peace, they want peace—' The major was impatient.

"'I won't talk or parley with you,' he said; 'it is fight or surrender; I await your answer.'

"'We surrender—we done so before, but we could not find you,' said Big Foot.

"I had my eye on the chief, who just then turned and motioned with his arm to his own battle line. They seemed to be looking for the signal, because the white flag was shown at once. We rode forward quick like and surrounded them, and a courier was sent off post haste for the four troops of the Seventh, and Lieutenant Taylor's scouts to help guard and disarm the party. They arrived the same day. Big Foot had one hundred and fifty warriors fully armed, with two hundred and fifty squaws and many children. Despite the surrender, we all knowed trouble was coming, and it was not long before it came, like one of them Kansan cyclones."

CHAPTER EIGHT

"THE BUCKS WERE COMING UP ALARMINGLY FAST."

"WHEN General Forsyth arrived," continued the scout, describing the battle of Wounded Knee Creek, "he ordered the male Indians to come for a talk. They came out scowling and sullen, and gathered in a half-circle in front of Big Foot's tent. The chief was inside, ill with pneumonia.

"The general told them they must surrender their arms in groups of twenty. By this time they were thoroughly enraged, but most of our boys thought they were so cowed they would obey without much trouble. I didn't like their looks, and told Jenkins at my side to hold himself ready, for I believed them fellows meant mischief, and a fight was sure to come.

"'I guess not,' he answered; 'they're obeying orders.'

"The first score slunk back without a word. We waited a long time, and by and by they came out agin, and how many guns do you 'spose they brought with 'em? Just two miserable pieces, worth so much old iron.

"The major was impatient because of the delay, and, when he saw this, he was anrgy too. He turned and talked a few minutes with General Forsyth, both speaking so low that I couldn't catch what they said though I seen the general was as angry as the major, but he kept cool. You see the major was managing the business, but he made sure that everything was done as General Forsyth wanted it.

"The cavalry was now ordered to dismount, and they done so, forming a square about fifty feet back and closed in, standing within a half-dozen rods of the Indians that was in the centre.

"It was plain that the Indians didn't mean to obey orders, though they pretended to. Accordingly a body of cavalry was sent to make the search themselves. When they came out, which they did in a few minutes, they brought sixty good rifles with them. That was doing the business up in style; but the general and the major didn't intend there should be any half-way work about it. The soldiers were directed to search the bucks themselves, for there was no doubt that all of 'em had their guns hidden in their blankets.

Just two miserable pieces, worth so much old iron

"The Sioux stood scowling and ugly and savage. When about a dozen had been searched and their rifles brought out, they couldn't stand it. They were furious. Like a flash, the rest of 'em whipped out their guns from

under their blankets and let fly at us. It was so sudden that before we knew what it meant, a hundred guns had been fired and the reports sounded like one volley.

"It was all done in a twinkling. There we were, close enough to almost touch the redskins, and the flash of their rifles was right in our faces. I remember that I was looking into the muzzle of one of 'em, when the gun went off, and I felt the bullet nip my ear; but others were not so fortunate, and the poor boys dropped as though so many thunderbolts had fallen among 'em.

"It didn't take long, howsumever, to get in our work.

"I can tell you," added Scout Jackson, "there was lively times for twenty minutes or a half an hour. During the battle we stood off some distance when firing at each other, but it was like you and me standing near enough to shake hands almost, and blazing away. Them redskins fought hard. It was bang, bang, with the soldiers dropping all around, and no saying when your own turn would come.

"But the hostiles got the worst of it. Some of 'em, seeing how it was going, broke through our lines and dashed for the hills to the south west. We followed them and the fighting kept up as bad as ever, but the shots wasn't so rapid; we lost about thirty men, and more than that wounded, and of them some are likely to die."

"Where were the squaws and the children during the fight?" asked Brinton.

An expression of scorn passed over the face of the scout.

"Where were they? Fighting like so many wild cats. You'll be told that we chased and shot down women and children. There's no question that a big lot of 'em was killed, and how was it to be helped? Them squaws was dressed so much like the bucks that you couldn't

be certain which was which. From the way they fought, you might have believed each one was ten bucks rolled into one.

"But of course we cleaned 'em out, for that's what the Seventh does always, when it undertakes that sort of thing. From what I've told you, you'll know there was hot work for a time. A youngster about like yourself had charge of a Hotchkiss gun, and the way he handled it all through the fight made us feel like cheering, even when we didn't dare to stop shooting long enough to do so.

"When the Sioux fled, this youngster dragged his gun from the knoll where he had been stationed. Lieutenant Hawthorne was at his side, and the fighting had become skirmishing on the crests of the ravines, where Big Foot's band had taken refuge. The bullets were singing and whistling through the air, but that boy wheeled his Hotchkiss to the mouth of the gulch, where the firing was the heaviest. The minute he done this, he and the men attached to the gun became the targets of the Indians, who was determined to shoot 'em down. The bullets splintered the wheels of the gun, and sent the dirt flying right and left and in the air. A ball struck Lieutenant Hawthorne's watch, glanced off, and wounded him; but the youngster pushed the gun forward and shelled the pockets in the ravines.

"That boy kept it up, pushing steadily onward and sending the shells wherever they could do the most harm. When the battle was over, he was found wounded, leaning against the shattered wheel of his gun, too weak to stand erect. Big Foot was among the killed."

Brinton was so interested in the story of his companion, who was too modest to dwell upon his own exploits, that he forgot for a few minutes his own situation and the absence of his family. With only a brief comment on what had been told him, he said, starting up—

"But, Nick, what have I been thinking of? Here the morning is fully come and I have not learned anything of mother, father, and Edith. How could I forget them so long?"

"It was my fault more than yours," replied Jackson; "there's nothing to be made by staying here; let's ride out of the gully and look around. I've had a bite, and have something left over; will you have it, Brint?"

"Not just now, thank you," replied Brinton, as he rode side by side with him out of the depression where he had spent the night.

Reaching the higher ground, they looked over the surrounding country. The youth gave his chief attention to the rear—that is, in the direction of the Big Cheyenne, for he believed that Wolf Ear and the other hostiles were not far off. But, if so, they were not in sight.

The scout, however, had discovered something in front, and at a considerable distance, which interested him. Shading his eyes with one hand, he gazed intently toward the north.

"By gracious!" he exclaimed, "I believe that's them."

"Where?" asked the boy, eagerly.

"I don't mean your folks, but that wagon train with supplies from Rapid City."

Brinton's heart sank, for his hopes had been high; but he found some consolation, after all, in the declaration of the scout.

A mile away, across the prairie, a party seemed to be preparing to leave camp. At that distance it was impossible to identify them, but Jackson was positive that they were the train in search of which he had left the camp at Wounded Knee.

Brinton's hope was that his parents were with them. It would have been hard for him to explain just why his hope was so strong in this

respect, but it seemed reasonable to suspect that the light of the camp had attracted their notice during the darkness, and that they had gone thither, after finding it impossible to rejoin him.

The real, but slight, ground on which he based this fancy was that his pony, Jack, had been found while he, his owner, was traveling in a direct line from the Big Cheyenne toward the camp. Since the animal must have kept company for a time with the other two, the Kingslands had continued the same course, and might have descried the twinkle of the camp fire.

"I myself would have seen it, had I not ridden the other way and gone into the gully, where I couldn't detect anything a dozen feet away."

"Yes, I'm almost sure it's them," added Jackson, after further studying the camp; "let's find out."

The proposition suited Brinton, and the two headed their ponies toward the camp.

Although at the moment of starting there was no danger in sight, and the supply train did not seem to have been disturbed, Nicholas Jackson was too experienced to forget every precaution, and while he studied the scene in front, he kept glancing back toward the other parts of the compass.

It was well he did so, for a few hundred yards only were passed when he said in a low voice, in which no excitement could be noted:

"It looks as if them bucks would like to j'ine our company."

Brinton glanced back and saw the half-dozen hostiles with whom he had had his stirring experiences the night before dashing towards them from the direction of the Cheyenne.

There was no need to engage them in a fight: indeed, it would have

It became apparent that the pursuers were gaining.—Page 80

been the height of imprudence to do so. Jackson and Brinton were well mounted, and they instantly struck their horses into a run. The Indians shouted on perceiving that they were discovered, and they also urged on their animals. Several shots were fired, but the distance was too great for them to have any effect.

The race had continued but a little while when it became apparent that the pursuers were gaining. Jackson's horse was doing his best, but Brinton's was not. He could draw away from the Indian ponies, but his rider held him back to keep the scout company.

The chase could not last for long, for the camp was comparatively near at hand, but the bucks were coming up alarmingly fast.

"There's no use of both of us being overhauled," said Jackson; "ride ahead and save yourself."

"But I can't desert you."

"Faugh! don't be foolish; you can't help me and you're sure to be shot if you stay; off with you!"

"But what will become of you?"

"That's nothing to you; it looks as if I must bid good-bye to you. Billberry has gone lame, but I'll make the best fight I can, and if I go down, some of 'em have got to go with me."

Brinton was much perplexed what to do, but he knew the question of life and death must be decided within the next few seconds.

CHAPTER NINE

"HE HAS MADE HIS LAST SCOUT"

THE perplexing question was settled by Brinton's pony taking his bit in his mouth, and speeding towards the camp of the supply train, as if driven by the wind.

The youth could not but feel conscience smitten at this apparent desertion of a comrade in dire extremity, but there was no help for it. Besides, Jackson was right when he urged Brinton to lose no time in saving himself, since it was out of his power to help the imperilled scout.

The pursuing hostiles had now approached near enough to make their shots effective. The whistling bullets warned Brinton of his danger, so he threw himself forward on the neck of his pony, who rushed ahead with arrowy swiftness.

The clatter of hoofs made young Kingsland glance to his left. He saw Billberry, the scout's steed, going madly on.

He had been touched by one of the flying bullets, and in his panic forgot the weak leg that already had delayed him to a fatal extent. His desperate burst of speed brought him alongside of Jack, whose rider, to his amazement saw him shoot ahead at a pace which none of his kind could surpass and none there could equal.

But his bridle-rein and stirrup-straps were flying in the gale caused by his own tremendous swiftness. Brave Nick Jackson had been shot from the back and was fighting his last fight.

Brinton Kingsland tugged at Jack's rein, and shouted a savage command in the same breath. The pony would not stop, but, slackening his speed described a circle, which brought him round with his head toward the pursuers.

With levelled Winchester the Scout bravely faced his foes

Pierced by one of the balls of the bucks, the scout fell from his saddle, but, recovering himself with wonderful dexterity, turned about, and with levelled Winchester bravely faced his foes.

The shots were rapid on both sides, and those of Jackson did much execution. But his fate was sealed from the first, and none knew it better than he.

"I can't stand that!" muttered young Kingsland, the moment he succeeded in facing Jack the other way. "I have already played the coward, though, heaven knows, I couldn't help it."

Something of his daring seemed to tingle in the veins of his pony; for, now that he was urged to return, he headed straight for the group of combatants, and shot forward at full speed.

Meanwhile the members of the supply train were not idle. They had descried the coming of the two horsemen from afar, and were

quick to recognize them as friends. Had there been any doubt, it vanished at sight of the pursuing Indians behind them. Three were in the saddle in an instant and scurrying to the relief of the solitary man fighting for his life.

Brinton was not aware they were at his heels. He mistook the sound of their horses' feet for that of Jackson's animal, who, he supposed, had turned, aad was rushing into the heart of the peril, as his kind will do when forced out of a burning building.

The first warning the youth received of the true state of affairs was when the approaching horsemen fired from behind him at the group crowding around and pressing the scout so sorely. But the hostiles were quicker than he to see their peril. They wheeled hastily, and, flinging themselves over the necks of their poneis, skurried in the direction of the Cheyenne.

It is the custom of the American Indians to carry off their dead and wounded. The latter probably looked after themselves in this case, but in their haste the two that had fallen by the hand of Nick Jackson were left stretched out on the ground.

An extraordinary incident now took place.

In the furious struggle one of the hostiles had become dismounted. Disregarding the fate of his companions, or probably seeing that the brave scout had become so weakened that the peril no longer existed, he leaped from the back of his pony and dashed forward to give the white man his finishing stroke. Before he could do this, the relief party were so close that he did not dare to tarry. He turned to remount his pony, but the animal had become panic-stricken in the flurry—it may have been that he was struck by a bullet—and was galloping off,

as if for his own life. Furthermore, he made straight for the camp of the supply train, so that his capture was impossible.

But there were two other animals that had lost their riders, and if he could secure one of these, he might yet save himself.

They, however, were galloping among the others riding for life on toward the Big Cheyenne. The bucks, with less chivalry than the youth had shown in similar circumstances, gave no heed to the peril of their dismounted comrade, but sped across the prairie at the utmost speed of which they were capable.

Among them was one, who seeing that the whites, instead of keeping up the pursuit, had halted round the fallen scout, gave a little thought to their comrade. This friend would not turn back himself, nor did any of the others do so, but with the palm of his hand the former smote one of the riderless ponies across the eyes and shouted a command in his ear. The horse checked himself with a cry of pain, reared, shook his head, and then, dropping out of the group running close together, wheeled and trotted toward the dismounted Indian.

The latter gave a thrilling exhibition of running. He saw that his only hope lay in reaching one of the ponies of his comrades that had basely deserted him, since to undertake to recapture his own animal must take him into the camp of his enemies. He therefore exerted himself to the utmost to overtake the party before the whites could overtake him.

Had there been none interested besides the three members of the supply train, all would have gone well with the buck, for, as we have said, they gathered around the fallen scout and gave their whole attention to him. But there was another, who resolved that this miscreant

He saw that his only hope lay in reaching one of the ponies.—Page 84

should pay for his unpardonable barbarity to a brave and fallen enemy. That one was Brinton Kingsland.

Quick to grasp the situation, after finding himself too late to help poor Jackson, he noted the solitary Indian, and believing him to be the one who had laid the scout low (though if he had not struck the actual blow, he was equally guilty), he compressed his lips and muttered:

"I'll teach you a lesson, you assassin!"

The redskin, as he ran, grasped his Winchester in his right hand in a trailing position. The heavy blanket was secured at the throat by some fastening that held it in place. The lower portion streamed out over his back, as did his long black hair, in the wind created by his own fleetness, while his leggings doubled and twinkled so fast that they resembled the spokes of a swiftly revolving wheel. He was, indeed, running with astonishing speed.

"Now, Jack, do your best! There isn't any time to lose, and you are not going to let a miserable redskin outspeed you."

The pony flung up his neck and away he went with arrowy swiftness. He knew what was wanted of him, and was not one to shirk his duty.

It was at this juncture that the fugitive, going like a whirlwind, for an instant turned his head and glanced back. Brinton was watching him, and saw the scowling face glaring like a wild beast through the thicket of flying hair.

"Great heavens! It is Wolf Ear!"

During these exciting moments the youth had forgotten about the young Ogalalla, until this glimpse of the well-remembered features told him the startling truth. The shock caused him involuntarily to tighten the rein of Jack, and the animal, instantly slackened his pace.

But the hesitation was for a few seconds only. Brinton felt that he ought not to have been surprised after the events of the preceeding day and night.

"He deserves death more than any of the rest, for his knowledge has been greater than theirs and his excuse is less. I'll run him down and take him prisoner."

Again he spoke sharply to Jack and twitched the rein. The noble animal stretched away with the same graceful swiftness he had shown from the first.

But the Ogalalla was cunning. He had seen the Indian pony as it withdrew from the rest and came trotting toward him in a bewildered way, as though not quite understanding what it meant; but if the animal was perplexed, Wolf Ear was not. He read the meaning aright, and saw that one desperate chance remained. If he could hurl himself upon the back of that same steed before the white youth overtook him, the prospect was good for his ultimate escape.

Brinton comprehended everything as vividly as he, and did not spare Jack. He aimed to interpose himself between Wolf Ear and his pony, and thus prevent their meeting. Every nerve and muscle was strained to accomplish that end.

Young Kingsland was already close enough to shoot down the fugitive, and he felt he deserved to be laid low, but, as we have shown, such was not his purpose. An indefinable dislike to slay a foe, even though ferocious and guilty, prevented his firing the shot that would speedily have ended all. The rest of the hostiles had disappeared over a swell of the plain and were out of reach.

Why did not Wolf Ear, when he saw he could not reach his pony in time, halt and bring his gun to bear on his fierce pursuer?

He did. The cunning fellow, almost within reach of the pony, and at the moment when heart his was beating high with hope, saw everything frustrated by the action of the animal. The sight of a person coming toward him at such terrific speed, even though belonging to the race to which he was accustomed, was too disturbing to be accepted with serenity. He raised his head as he came to a halt, surveyed the bounding figure, and then, with a snort of affright, wheeled and trotted toward the river.

His speed was much less than that of the Ogalalla, but of necessity it compelled the latter to run farther than he would have done had the beast remained stationary, and it was just that brief interval of longer waiting on the ground that told the Ogalalla that the white youth must reach him before he could overtake the pony.

"Surrender, Wolf Ear!" called Brinton: "you can't help yourself."

Evidently Wolf Ear held a different opinion, for he wheeled like lightning, and leveled his rifle with the reply:

"That's the way I surrender! Do you surrender!"

The action was so sudden that Brinton could not forestall him. He was fairly caught.

It was however far from Brinton's thought to yield to this startling command. He flung himself over the other side of the saddle, so as to offer as little of his body as possible to the aim of the miscreant. He was certain he would fire and shoot down his horse, if not himself. He waited with an intensity of emotion which can not be described.

One minute, two minutes passed, but no report came. Then Brinton heard the suspicious clatter of a horse's hoofs aad peeped over the spine of Jack. He was in time to see Wolf Ear galloping off on the back of the pony. With inimitable dexterity he had secured the ani-

mal during the brief interval at his command, and was now going like the wind over the prairie after his departed comrades.

The Ogalalla, however, was not too far away to shout back a taunt and the words:

"Wise young man, my gun was not loaded, but it served me as well."

Then he whisked over the elevation and vanished.

There was no help for it, and the chagrined Brinton wheeled and galloped toward the group whom he had left some distance behind on the prairie. They were riding slowly to the camp, supporting a form between them. Dreading the truth, Brinton held back until the others reached the camp. Then he rode forward and asked:

"Was Nick badly hurt?"

"He is dead; he did not speak after we reached him. He was a brave fellow, but he has made his last scout."

Brinton sighed, for he respected and loved the man who had thus died for his country.

But another question was on his lips. He looked around the camp, and his heart sank at his failure to see any of the loved ones whom he was so hopeful of finding there. In a trembling voice he put the query.

The answer was what he dreaded: they had neither seen nor did they know anything about them.

CHAPTER TEN

"OH, THERE IS WOLF EAR!"

IT will be remembered that when Brinton Kingsland dropped to the ground in the gathering darkness to check the crossing of the Big Cheyenne by the Sioux, whose leader had met him in midstream, he called in an undertone to his parents to hasten out of the range of the flying bullets; he repeated the command to his pony Jack, who obediently trotted after them.

The father and mother, at this time, had no more thought of separating themselves for any distance from their brave son than he had, but two causes brought about the singular accident already referred to.

The excited words of Brinton and the reports of the guns led them to think the danger nearer than it was. As a consequence, they rode farther than was necessary, but still not to a point that ought to have caused any difficulty in their coming together when prudent to do so.

Mr. Kingsland's pony traveled faster than that of his wife, thus placing him a few yards in advance. The gloom had not yet become deep enough to prevent their seeing each other; but at a moment when the wife was about to ask her husband to stop, she was surprised to see him turn to the left, his pony struggling up the bank to the level ground above.

"Why do you do that, Hugh?" she called in a guarded voice, but at once following him.

He did not answer, but narrowly missed falling out of the saddle.

His animal continued moving away from the riverbank and presently struck into an easy gallop, which rapidly increased the distance from the stream.

Mrs. Kingsland now suspected the meaning of the strange action, and urged her pony beside that of her husband, which was moving so fast that she was obliged to travel farther than she supposed before coming up with him. Then, laying hold of the bridle, she brought her husband's pony to a halt.

"What is the matter, Hugh?" she asked; "are you ill?"

"Gracious! what have I been doing?" he exclaimed, in turn bewildered, and looking about in the darkness.

"Why you have been trying to run away from us," said Edith with a laugh, believing the whole thing to be a joke on her father's part.

"You have come a good way from the riverbank," replied the disturbed wife; "I tried to check you, but could not."

"I understand now," said he, passing his hand across his forehead, in the effort to collect his thoughts. "Just after we started a faintness seized me, and I knew nothing until this minute. I don't understand why I did not fall out of the saddle."

"I saw you reel, and vou must have come near doing so. How do you feel now?"

"Much better. Strange that I should have been attacked in that manner; but I am sure it will not occur again. What will Brinton think?"

"I have heard the report of guns, but it is all quiet now."

"I feel little alarm, for they will not dare to cross while he is guarding the ford."

"Is he not in danger?"

"No, he is lying on the ground, and they can not see him; he will hold them at bay as long as he wishes."

"But they may come over some other point and get behind him."

"I did not think of that," said her husband more thoughtfully; but I am sure he will not stay any longer than he ought. It won't do for us to go back, for, if the Indians do cross the river, we shall be in their path. It may be well to go part of the way over our own track, so as to make it easier for him to find us. Come on, and make no noise."

"But you are not taking the right course," protested the wife: "you should turn more to the left."

"I feel almost sure you are wrong; but you have had your senses about you all the time, which is more than I have had, and I bow to your decision."

"But, mother, you are not right," interposed Edith, now fully awake; "you should go that way," and she indicated a route entirely different from either of the others—so different, indeed, that her mother could not accept it.

"No, dear, you are wrong," she calmly replied. "I will lead."

And yet there is reason to believe the child was nearer right than either, and had her suggestion been adopted, much of what followed might have been averted.

While they were riding, as they believed, in the direction of the Big Cheyenne, Mr. Kingsland noticed that Brinton's pony was not with them. His wife said he did not come up the riverbank, and was probably waiting for Brinton to come to him. It will thus be seen that the boy was wrong in his supposition about Jack's movements.

By-and-by the time came when Mrs. Kingsland saw she had committed a sad blunder, and, instead of approaching the river, had gone

still farther from it; they could hear nothing of its flow, and were thus lost on the prairie. Husband and wife now debated what was best to do, and it was found when each, including Edith, named the supposed direction to the stream, they were as widely apart as before.

"The wisest course is to stop trying to find the river," said Mr. Kingsland, "for every effort only takes us farther away; we might as well go into camp right here."

"And freeze to death?"

"No, we will ride round until we find some shelter from this cutting wind, and then make ourselves as comfortable as we can until morning. Do you see that light away to the south?"

That which the ranchman saw was the glow which had attracted Brinton's notice. The latter saw it in its true direction—that is, in the northern horizon, from which the bewilderment of his parents will be evident.

In the hope of finding their way to the river the couple acted upon what might be considered a compromise. It is not necessary to say that every yard thus traversed increased the space between them and Brinton, who, at that moment, was groping blindly in quest of them.

The wanderings of the stray ones, however, were fortunately not long continued, when the ponies of their own accord descended a depression in the prairie. It was not deep or well protected, and was not reached until after they had passed over several elevations, but they accepted the shelter thankfully, and dismounted.

The three were cramped from their long constraint, and Edith ran around and here and there for some minutes before she was willing to be tucked away for the night. Their abundant clothing enabled them to get along much better than might be supposed; the little one lay

between her father and mother, the ponies being allowed to stay by themselves. As in Brinton's case, the long wintry night passed without disturbance or incident.

With the coming of the daylight Mr. Kingsland roused himself, and seeing his wife and child were still sleeping, he did not awake them, but took the best survey he could of their surroundings.

The weather was still intensely cold and the sky overcast. A look at his watch showed it was nearly eight o'clock when he clambered out of the depression and looked about him.

The first discovery to cause surprise was the shelter that they had enjoyed during the night. Instead of being a ravine, like that where Brinton had slept, this was a rough, irregular excavation, some forty or fifty feet in diameter. The sides sloped gently, the whole appearance being that of an immense hole left by some great explosion of gunpowder, to which a providential chance had guided their horses.

The husband saw no sign of any living being besides those with him, nor could he form any surmise as to the course to be taken to effect a meeting with his son.

"What will Brinton think? After doing so bravely the work I ought to have done, we left him in the lurch. We are as much lost to each other as if in the depths of an African jungle with miles intervening. I can't help feeling that the top of that ridge yonder would give me a view that would disclose something important."

He debated with himself whether it was prudent to walk thither and obtain the coveted survey. It was little more than a hundred yards distant, and it did not seem that any harm could come to the loved ones whom he would leave but a few minutes.

"I must manage to get my bearings in some way before I can do

anything. The sun seems to be off yonder behind the clouds, but it really appears to me as if it were in the wrong place."

He ended the doubt by striding to the elevation, rifle in hand. Since his faintness of the night before, he had felt better and stronger than he had for weeks, and this fact doubtless had much to do with the feeling of self-confidence which now nerved him.

Reaching the crest of the ridge or swell in the prairie, Kingsland was disappointed. The same kind of a view confronted him on every hand. He experienced a repetition of that sensation which often comes to one in his situation: if he could only pass to the top of the next elevation, he would obtain the view he wanted.

But Hugh Kingsland was too wise to yield to the prompting. One precious member of his family was already gone he knew not where, and he would incur no risk of its being further broken up.

He was roused from his meditations in the most startling manner, the cause being a rifle shot, undoubtedly aimed at himself. On the summit of the ridge at which he was gazing, and almost at the very point, two Indian bucks suddenly walked up from the other side in plain sight. While they were ascending, and when only their heads and waists showed, one of them brought his rifle to his shoulder, and tried his skill on the white man across in the valley-like depression.

Mr. Kingland did not tarry long enough to reply, but hurried back to the hollow where he had left his wife and child. They had awakened, but were not alarmed at his absence, the wife suspecting the cause. She had brought out what was left of the lunch, and she and Edith were calmly eating when he reappeared, his looks and manner showing that he had made some terrifying discovery.

He quickly explained what had taken place, adding:

"I am in doubt whether to mount the ponies and start to flee, or to stay where we are and try to fight them off."

"You saw only two, and they were on foot."

"But they were sure to have ponies near, and more than likely more of the hostiles are within call."

Two Indian bucks suddenly walked up from the other side.

"Let us stay here until something is learned," said the wife, showing admirable coolness and courage.

Whether or not this was the wiser course to pursue remains to be seen, but it was followed. Mr. Kingsland crept near to the top of the hollow, and lying extended at full length against the sloping bank, he peered over, with his rifle ready to fire at the first appearance of danger. His position was such that he could detect the approach of any one from that side, while his wife guarded the other in a similar manner.

The ponies having been quieted, Edith was cautioned to remain near them, and to avoid exposing herself to any stray shots that might be fired. As long as she kept at the bottom of the hollow with the animals, she and they were safe.

A full hour passed without the least sign of the hostiles. A less expe-

rienced person might have accepted this evidence that the danger was over; but when a second hour had worn away with the same quietness everywhere, the husband and wife still maintained their watchfulness.

The forenoon was half gone before this vigilance was rewarded. Mrs. Kingsland called to her husband that there was something suspicious in front of her; and pausing only long enough to make sure that nothing of the kind was immediately before him, he slipped down the hollow and up the opposite side of the slope to her.

"Where is it?" he asked in an undertone.

"Just over that swell, and a little to the left."

"I see him; keep down out of sight!"

He placed the muzzle of his Winchester over the side of the hollow took careful aim at the rough head that had risen a few inches above the slight swell in the prairie, and let fly. The aim was perfect, as was shown by the instant disappearance of the crown and the cry which from behind the elevation sounded if as farther off.

Instantly three or four replies came from other points along the swell, and the bullets chipped the dirt about the face of Kingsland, who ducked his head out of range. Knowing, however, how much depended on his concealing his weakness from the hostiles, he fired four shots quickly, without special aim, and with no expectation of accomplishing anything execpt that named.

"If I can make them think there are half a dozen rifles here on guard they will be careful about attacking. But they mustn't know how weak we are."

"I don't think that we are so weak in this hollow, and with that repeating gun, and you feeling so strong and well."

At this juncture a cry was heard from Edith. She had forgotten her

father's command and had crept up the slope opposite: "Oh, there is Wolf Ear!"

Before any one could stop her she sprang up the bank and ran toward the ridge where her father had first seen the two hostiles. The horrified parents at the same moment saw three other Indians dash toward the innocent child, who never dreamed of her peril.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"I'M OFF! GOOD-BYE !"

THOUGH his brave companion had fallen almost at his side Brinton Kingsland had reached the camp of the supply train without receiving so much as a scratch. He mourned him, for he was a worthy man; but he was heartbroken at his failure to gain tidings of his loved parents and his little sister. He did not know what to do, and could only fear the worst.

When he had told his story to his new friends, none of them were able to offer any encouragement or hope.

The supply train consisted of a dozen wagons in charge of sixteen teamsters. As a matter of course, all were armed, and had come thus far without trouble.

They were making ready to resume their journey to Wounded Knee when the affray just described took place. This caused an hour's delay, and now, when about to start again, the signs of danger became so threatening, they held back for consultation.

The Indians whom they had driven from the prostrate form of Scout Jackson reappeared on the crest of the hill over which they had skurried, and it was noticed that their number was increased to fully a dozen.

While the teamsters were watching them another band came in sight, in the opposite direction.

To the dismay of the spectators, this party was more numerous than

the first. Not only that, but both bands advanced at a slow trot, and met at a point a couple of hundred yards distant, and in a place over which the train would have to pass if it pushed on toward the camp at Wounded Knee.

"Boys," said Captain Wadsworth, who was in charge of the train, "there's going to be a fight."

"We ought to be able to keep them off," replied one of his men.

"So we shall if no more appear; but the Sioux are as thick as berries, and by-and-by we shall have a hundred or more of them popping away at us. We may as well get ready for what's certain to come."

"Jackson said something to me," remarked Brinton, "about an escort having been sent out from Wounded Knee to bring you in."

"They can't come any too soon," responded the captain, who fully comprehended the peril; "but I'm afraid they will be too late. Those Indians don't let the grass grow under their feet."

The leader did not content himself with talking, but began to prepare for the attack, which might come at any moment. The wagons were drawn up in a circle, in the middle of which were placed the horses. Bags of grain, boxes and bundles, were plied on the ground underneath the wagons. These made an additional protection for the animals, and screened the men, when kneeling behind and firing at their assailants.

The hostiles were quick to detect what was going on, and did not allow the work to be completed without interference. They began circling back and forth, riding entirely around the camp and discharging their guns at it. The exhibition of horsemanship was a fine one; but they kept at such a distance that their shots did little damage. In some way, one got through the entrenchments, as they might be called,

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and slightly wounded a horse in the shoulder. He made more fuss than if it had gone through his head, rearing, snorting, and plunging, and throwing the rest into a panic, which would have ended in a stampede, had they not been guarded with unusual care.

The teamsters did not accept these unwelcome attentions meekly, but fired at their circling assailants; the cause named, however, prevented much success. It looked as if one or two of the shots inflicted damage, but not to the extent of disabling any pony or his rider.

Standing near the rear of one of the wagons, where he could see all that was going on, Captain Wadsworth watched the exciting incidents. At his elbow was Brinton Kingsland, who did not think it worth while to try his hand with his Winchester, though the others were continually cracking around him.

"What is to be feared," said the captain, "is that the hostiles will soon increase to such an extent that they will overwhelm us."

"How many do you think are out there now?" inquired Brinton.

"I should say between twenty and thirty—that is, there were a few minutes ago, but there are five or six less now."

"What is the meaning of that?"

The leader turned his bronzed face toward the youth and smiled significantly.

"Don't you catch on? They have sent after reinforcements. A slight number now means a big number pretty soon."

"Have you noticed those bucks on the top of the ridge yonder?"

Captain Wadsworth looked in the direction named. Three Indian bucks had dismounted, and were standing close together, or rather two of them were, while the third seemed to be stooping and busy with something on the ground.

"How long have they been there?" asked the leader."

"They rode up the slope within the last five minutes. They were off their ponies before they stopped. I can't guess what they are trying to do."

"I don't know, but we shall soon learn."

Although the cracking of rifles continued, and the teamsters, kneeling behind the fortifications were doing their utmost to pick off some of the dusky riders who in turn sent in their dropping shots, Captain Wadsworth gave them little heed. The position of himself and Brinton were exposed, and, had their assailants come closer, they would not have dared to maintain it; but with the combatants so widely separated, it can not be said they were in much real danger.

The three Indians in whom our friends were so much interested just then were beyond and apart from the others. Their horses were cropping the few blades of withered grass that had survived the winter's tempests; but not one was a dozen yards from his master, all of whom were so grouped together that their movements could not be identified.

Rather curiously there was not a spy-glass among the teamsters. such an article would have been invaluable just then; but they had to depend upon their unaided vision.

The captain and Brinton, however, agreed that two of the bucks were bent over and busy with something on the ground, while the third, standing on the crest of the ridge, appeared to be awaiting the action of his companions before carrying out some plan he had in mind.

"Look!" whispered the youth; "isn't that smoke?"

The captain was silent a moment before answering.

"Yes; the Indian is like the Chinaman. He can start a fire where you and I could not kindle a spark. I believe they will make a bundle

of water-soaked leaves crackle and burn like tinder wood. Those fellows have got some of the dried grass together and have managed to touch it off. You understand what that means, of course?"

"I can not say that I do."

"It is a signal fire."

"Kindled for what purpose?"

"To call all the other hostiles in sight here, to take a hand in the fun of massacring us and plundering our train. Such a signal can be seen a long way and will do all that is intended. Look at it now!"

From between the two, who now rose from their stooping posture, a thin finger of vapor arose, going straight upward as if it were a shadowy arrow aimed at the clouds.

"One of the bucks is waving his blanket," observed Brinton; "he must mean something by that. I suppose he is fanning the blaze to keep it from going out."

"No; look at that thin line of smoke; don't you see something rather peculiar?"

"Ah, I notice it now."

The vapor showed a striking change of appearance; instead of climbing in a straight line, it now waved gracefully from side to side. It was something which never can occur unless with the help of some person.

"That is the signal," said Captain Wadsworth; "it can be seen for miles in all directions, and every Indian eye that catches sight of it will read its meaning as plainly as our soldiers do the looking-glass signals. It's a bad thing for us."

The captain was an old campaigner, and knew what he was talking about; his impressive manner was not lost upon Brinton Kingsland.

"How far are we from Wounded Knee?" he asked.

"Anywhere from a dozen to twenty miles; it depends on the course we take—that is," he added, with a shake of his head, "whether we ever take any course at all."

"I can not recall just what Jackson said about an escort from that camp, but I think he told me such an escort had been sent."

The captain shook his head.

"You must be mistaken; for, if that were the case, why did he ride out here alone? Was it not more likely that he came to learn whether we needed protection? If that is so, they will wait for his return and report before sending out the escort which is the only thing that can save us."

The vapor showed a striking change of appearance.

This view was so reasonable that Brinton could not combat it.

"I see one chance," ventured the youth, after a moment's silence, during which he watched the actions of the signal corps on the ridge.

The officer turned wonderingly toward him.

"I shall be glad to hear what it is."

"If a messenger can get through to Wounded Knee with word of your extremity, they will send you help without delay."

"True; but how can such a thing succeed? If it were night it might be done, but in what possible way can a horseman dash through the lines when the bucks would see him start, and they have surrounded us?"

"It will be taking big risks, but I would like to try it."

Captain Wadsworth, who had been leaning against the hind wheel of one of the wagons, with his arms folded, abruptly straightened up and stared at the youth, as if uncertain whether he had heard him aright; then he repeated:

"*You* would like to try it, did you say?"

"Yes, sir; and I believe I could get through."

The officer looked off toward the ridge and shook his head.

"Don't think of such a thing; we must stay here and fight it out, and trust to Providence to open the way, if any is to be opened."

But Brinton was in earnest, and his eagerness was increased by the discouraging manner of the captain.

"I understand your feelings, and I am not blind to what is in the path of the one who attempts to do what I have proposed; but, captain bear two things in mind: there isn't a fleeter horse in the whole West than my Jack. When I gave him rein he pulled away from those Indians as though their animals were walking. So all I have to do is to get a fair start."

"Exactly," replied the leader, with a grim smile, "and therein you

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sum up the whole business. All that you need to succeed is to succeed. But what is the other point you wish me to hold in mind?"

"That a fair start can be secured."

"How?"

"Pretend to ride out against the hostiles. They will gather in front of the threatened point. I will be on the watch, and, when the way opens, will scoot for Wounded Knee."

Brinton saw that Captain Wadsworth was interested. Once more he came to the erect position, and looking kindly into his face, said:

"Your plan has something in it."

The youth's heart leaped with hope.

"I am sure of it; but there's not a minute to lose."

This was self-evident, and the captain, having made up his mind, passed among his men and hurriedly explained what he had decided to do. It was for eight or ten of them to mount their horses and move cautiously toward the ridge, as if with the intention of attacking the little signal party there and stamping out their tiny fire. This would cause a concentration (or, more properly, it was hoped that it would) of the hostiles on that side of the camp, of which Brinton Kingsland would take advantage by dashing out on the other side and riding at full speed to Wounded Knee.

It was the only thing that offered hope, and, therefore, was eagerly accepted by all. The firing was so scattered that no fear was felt in moving about within the circle of wagons, for, as has been shown, Captain Wadsworth and Brinton had been exposed all the time without harm. The Sioux kept so far away that it was evident they were waiting for the arrival of reinforcements before making a real attack.

The preparations on the part of the teamsters had hardly begun

when Brinton, who had led his pony forth and stood ready to leap into the saddle, called out:

"You needn't do it. Here's my chance!"

The most of the Indians were near the ridge at that moment, but some of them were quite a distance off, and, in fact, alarmingly close to the opposite side of the camp. The impatient youth was confident that he could dash through the opening before they could stop him.

"It won't do!" protested Captain Wadsworth; "don't try it! wait till we get them nearer the ridge; they will cut you off——"

"I'm off! Good-bye!"

Brinton Kingsland was in the saddle, and shot out from among the wagons like a thunderbolt.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WHAT HAPPENED TO WOLF EAR

GOOD fortune attended the daring attempt of Brinton Kingsland. By a providential occurrence, most of the hostiles were on the side of the supply camp, in the direction of the ridge from whose crest the signal smoke was ascending, when the youth, dexterously guiding his pony through the wagons that were all about him, quickly cleared himself of all obstacles.

"Now, Jack, old boy, do your best! Never was there greater need of it."

The intelligent creature thrust his nose forward, and was off like a shot. He knew what was wanted, and nobly responded to the call upon his fleetness. The teamsters forgot all about the Indians, and fixed their gaze upon the youth.

He was fully a hundred yards from camp before the Sioux comprehended what had been done, Then, when they saw the messenger dashing over the plain, fully a dozen of the best mounted were after him in a flash, discharging several of their guns at the moment of starting. Brinton was seen to thunder up the incline of the first swell, sitting firmly in his saddle, and instantly disappeared over the crest. A minute later, the foremost two of the pursuers skimmed up the same incline just as the lad shot into sight on the summit of the next elevation, instantly whisking out of view over that, while his superb horse continued his arrowy flight toward Wounded Knee. Then the excited

and hopeful teamsters could see no more, and all but the foremost two of the pursuers gave up the chase and came straggling back to join their comrades in the attack on the camp. They knew that the result of the flight of the messenger would be to bring help, and, if anything was to be accomplished, it must be before it could arrive.

And so the attack on the camp was begun at once, and with a fierceness that speedily brought a crisis.

Meanwhile, Brinton Kingsland was going with undiminished speed over the prairie, skimming up the inclines and down the slopes at a break-neck pace, and with every nerve of his splendid steed strained to the highest. The rider heard the dull report of the rifles that were fired at him, but the distance was too great to cause alarm, and he did not even hear the singing of the bullets, so wide went they of the mark; but the glance cast over his shoulder showed that he had only two pursuers to fear.

It was easy to compare their speed with his, and less than half a mile was passed, when all doubt vanished. They had been thrown a hundred paces to the rear and were losing ground every minute.

At the instant of shooting up one of the slopes and disappearing over the crest, Brinton snatched off his cap and swung it over his head with a joyous shout.

"Hurrah, Jack! they're not in it with you; you can take it more easily now."

Nevertheless, the speed of the pony was maintained for a brief time until it became certain that his two pursuers had given up the attempt to overtake him, and had gone to wreak their fury on the imperiled teamsters before help could reach them. Then Brinton made Jack drop to a pace which he could continue for hours without fatigue.

The youth knew the course to follow to reach the camp at Wounded Knee Creek, and he calculated that he could readily cover the ground in the course of an hour or so.

He was too sensible, however, to imagine that an open and uninterrupted course lay before him. At that time the country in the neighborhood of the Bad Lands, the reservations and the space between, was overrun with hostiles, as eager as so many jungle tigers to slay settlers, small squads of soldiers, and all the white people whom it was safe to attack. He was liable to encounter some of these bands at any moment and only by continual vigilance could he avoid running into the cunningly laid traps which proved fatal to scores of others.

Now the burst of excitement was over, and he was riding at a less killing pace, his thoughts went back to the loved ones from whom he had been so strangely separated. His heart became as lead, as he reflected that they could hardly have escaped, considering the condition of his father, from the environing perils which covered the miles of territory in every direction.

"If I only knew where they were, if alive, I would guide this escort from Wounded Knee to their help——"

What was that? Surely he heard the report of guns from some point in advance. Jack pricked up his ears and increased his pace.

"It can have but one meaning," muttered Brinton, with a throbbing heart; "some one is in peril: can it be they?"

He reined up his pony and stood still on the crest of the first elevation he reached, after the ominous sounds fell on his ears.

At that moment he descried coming over another ridge, a furlong away, a troop of thirty or forty cavalry, riding at a gallop toward him.

"That's the escort from Wounded Knee," was his instant conclu-

sion. "I was right when I told Captain Wadsworth that Nick Jackson said that an escort was on the way, though I wasn't certain of it."

But evidently the firing had not come from the cavalry. It was from some point between, and, instead of being directly in front, as it at first seemed, was off to the right, where he observed a depression, with several dismounted Indians crouching around it.

"Great heavens! it's father fighting them off," he gasped; "He's in that hollow and they have attacked him."

He struck his heels against Jack's sides, fiercely jerked the bridle-rein, and shouted to him to run at his best straight for the spot.

But the approaching cavalry had descried the same thing and were nearer the hollow than Brinton was. They turned the heads of their horses and struck off at full speed.

The assailing Indians, too, had discovered their danger, and were seen skurrying for their ponies, waiting near. The obedient animals turned until their masters sprang upon their backs, when they dashed off at full speed, with a single exception. One of them, forgetful of his danger, or determined upon revenge, even at the cost of his life, was observed to have something in his arms as he held his ground.

"It is Edith that he is about to kill; maybe he has already hurt or killed her! O heaven!" groaned Brinton, "is it too late to save her?"

Jack was tearing over the ground at a killing pace, but he could not reach them in time. He could carry his rider there in time to shoot down the Indian, but not soon enough to prevent his burying his knife in the innocent heart.

But there was a wonderful sharpshooter among the cavalry. He saw the awful peril, and throwing his horse on his haunches, brought his gun to his shoulder.

During the instant it was at a level, Hugh Kingsland dashed out of the hollow, bare-headed, and with hair streaming, ran toward the Indian and his little girl. One pace behind him sped his wife; she was seen to make quick, earnest gestures to the approaching horsemen, and they thought it an appeal to them not to lose a second if they would save her child.

Throwing his horse on his haunches, he brought his gun to his shoulder.

At that instant the sharpshooter pressed the trigger of his weapon; the Indian dropped the little one, threw up his arms in an aimless way, staggered back, and sank to the ground.

The next minute the troop thundered up, Brinton almost among them.

"Are you hurt, my darling Edith?" he called, leaping out of the saddle, catching her in his arms, pressing her to his heart and kissing her; "speak! did he hurt you?"

The child was bewildered by the great confusion, and, without answering her brother, looked him affrightedly in the face.

"Why, Brint, is that you?"

"Yes, yes; heaven be praised, you are not harmed! Oh, how can I be thankful enough? And father and mother! what a blessed sight!"

The mother gave him one grateful glance, and then knelt by the fallen Indian, just as Edith, slipping from her brother's grasp, ran to the prostrate figure and bent over it, asking in a voice of inexpressible tenderness:

"What is the matter, Wolf Ear?"

The young Ogalalla lay on his back, but at the moment the child spoke he managed, by a great effort, to raise his head and rest it on his hand. He had not spoken, but now, fixing his dark eyes on Edith, said in a faint voice:

"Wolf Ear is hurt!"

The troopers sat silent on their horses, looking down on the strange scene. Hugh Kingsland, with no trace of his illness, stood back a few paces with folded arms, gazing at the moving sight and trying in vain to restrain his emotions. His wife placed her arm under the Ogalalla's head, and, resting it on her knee, smoothed the black hair from his forehead, murmuring words of sympathy. Edith covered her face with her hands, and sobbed with a breaking heart.

Brinton was affected at the sight of his former friend, but he could not help saying:

"Mother, we all pity him, but he was our enemy; had he not been shot at that moment Edith would not be living now."

"You are wrong, my son," she replied gently. "Wolf Ear came forward to save Edith."

"What are you saying?"

"He was with the party that attacked us; he did what he could to restrain them; he could not do so, and he ran forward to join and help us defend ourselves against them. Edith saw him first and hurried to meet him. He caught her up, and, when his companions would have

harmed her, he would not let them touch her. He shouted to us to have no fear, that he was our friend. At that moment the soldiers came in sight and the other Indians made off. Wolf Ear knew we were saved, and so he stood still, with Edith's arms around his neck. I saw one of the soldiers aiming at them with his gun. Your father and I ran out to shield him. I shouted and motioned to the soldier not to shoot, but he did not understand me, and—this is the sad result of the dreadful mistake."

Wolf Ear fixed his eyes upon the wondering Brinton, who, walking forward, and stooping down, asked in a choking voice,

"Is this all true, Wolf Ear?"

"The words of your mother are true."

"But what meant your course toward me yesterday? I can not reconcile that with what I have just heard?"

"We parted friends, though I told you I was an enemy of your race. From the moment we separated I have done all I could to find your people and save them before it was too late. Until now I have not met you since."

"You forget; we met in the gorge last night, and only this morning, when you sought the life of Nick Jackson, I chased you over the ridge in the effort to make you a prisoner."

A smile overspread the dark face, and the head swayed a single time to one side.

"Brinton, you are mistaken; the Ogalalla whom you met, as you say, in the gully, and whom you sought to make prisoner, was not I—he was my twin brother, Young Bear; our mother can hardly tell us apart, and I have taught him to speak English as well as I."

"Oh, what have I done!" wailed Brinton, breaking down utterly,

"Is all this true, Wolf Ear?"—Page 116

and covering his face with his hands. "I never dreamed of this; can you forgive this dreadful mistake?"

"Yes," said Wolf Ear, faintly, "I forgive you; I forgive the soldier who shot me, for he did it to give *her* life."

He wearily closed his eyes, but opened them again when he felt Edith's chubby arms clasped round his neck, and her lips pressed against his.

"Oh, Wolf Ear!" she sobbed, in tones that brought tears to more than one eye among the bronzed troopers, "do not die! I love you, next to Brint and papa and mamma——"

Among the silent troopers touched by the scene was the sharpshooter who had brought Wolf Ear low. He was a brave, rugged soldier, but, like most men, had a tender heart. He had not spoken for some minutes, and his eyes were moist as he swung his foot from his stirrup and over the haunch of his horse to the ground.

"Jim Budworth don't often make a miss," he said in a broken voice, "and I didn't miss this time, but then I didn't aim to kill him, and I don't believe I did. I know a little about surgery myself, so let me take a look at Wolf Ear, as you call him."

Wondering at the words of the sharpshooter, and hardly daring to hope he was right, all watched him as he made what might be called a medical examination of the sufferer. The bullet had struck him in the side, and evidently had inflicted the wound intended.

"Injins are tough," remarked Budworth, "and this one is as tough as the rest. He isn't going to die. Here, Wolf Ear, try this."

As he spoke, he held a flask of spirits to the lips of the young Indian and forced him to swallow some of it. It produced an immediate effect; and to the astonishment of every one, Wolf Ear assumed a sitting position and looked around with a smile.

"I feel better—much better, thank you," he said, with a grateful look at Budworth.

"Of course you do. It was a narrow chance for you and no mistake; but all you want is careful nursing, and I reckon Mrs. Kingsland here will be glad to give it to you."

"Indeed I will," said the delighted woman; "there is nothing that I will not do for Wolf Ear. Can it be possible that he is going to get well after all?"

"Of course it is; I know all about Injins."

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed the happy Edith, throwing her arms again about his neck.

"Easy now, easy now," said Budworth; "don't go to rolling and tumbling him about until he gets a little stronger. After that you can handle him as you choose."

Wolf Ear rallied with amazing quickness, and showed all the heroism of his race, when he was helped upon his horse, and the party moved back to the supply camp, where the teamsters had succeeded in driving off the hostiles.

The Indian was given an easy, comfortable couch in one of the wagons, and some hours later the party arrived at Wounded Knee. There the sufferer received the best of medical attention and was soon able to move about with scarcely any pain or trouble. His recovery was rapid, and only a slight scar remained to show how nearly he met death in his efforts to save his friends from the warriors of his own race.

And within the following few weeks the threatening cloud that had overspread the Western sky, behind which the blood-red lightning gleamed and played, dissolved, and gave place to the sweet sunshine of peace, which, let us pray, may continue for ever.

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